ANOTHER
RABCO
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issue 2
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circles
issue 2
summer 2001

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From the Editor's Desk

Needless to say, a lot has happened to the four of us since the last issue. I'll try to compress it down as best as one page can do. First, a dedication. On September 9, 2001, my grandfather passed away. Besides being the majority investor in RABCO's ever decreasingly vast publishing empire, he was a prolific artist and sculptor. Lawrence Rabbitt started the Ceramic Arts Studio in Madison, WI which later went onto some renowned as a source for collectable figurines. There's even a State of Wisconsin historical plaque at the site of the studio. He was also a painter and a big fan of alternative comics (and I found a copy of a reprint of the "Rip-Off Press" compilation in his art studio.) So, here's to Grandpa.

As you might know, this issue was originally intended to arrive sometime in September 2001. Besides the obvious, a lesser tragedy that happened that month was when RABCO was sued by a company over the name "Mailbox Books." After 15 years, this company decided that they owned the trademark. Now, I can't say who was right or wrong (because you never know if they might sue me again....) $20,000 in legal fees later (plus a whole bunch of other costs), we've changed the name of the comic store to "Rabbit Valley." That sucked a lot of the resources of the company out into a lawyer induced vacuum, never to be recovered. I'd like to thank all the folks who were patient with us and bought stuff, especially during January and February. That money let us get this book out the door.

Other excitement... Scott moved to LA on us, but he knows that his home is always here in Boston. Andy and I both lost our day jobs in September and November. Andy's working again, so that's a good sign for the economy. Andy's grandmother passed away around New Years, I'm afraid. Here's her connection to the story; the house at 6 Kinsey Circle is based off the layout and design of her house and apartment. We're going to miss her, and we're dedicating this issue to Grandma too.

I guess we're just living that old Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times." Can't deny that the last couple of months have been interesting!

A note and correction for the purists. You may notice that this book is listed as Summer 2001. This isn't a misprint. The series you're reading happens in "the real world," albeit through slightly fuzzy and furry lenses. Thus, this story occurred during Summer of 2001. Our next issue will cover Fall 2001.

Also, in the last issue, we noted that Marty and Taye went to Boston College. I believe that Andy said something like, "I have no idea what I was thinking." Correct that to Boston University. Future reprints will be certain to note that. (Please, BU, don't sue us for using your name....)

Thank you for your support, thank you for your patience, and come visit us in Rabbit Valley sometime. Our new web site is http://www.rabbitvalley.com/ where you can visit the Vast Catalog of Other Good Stuff and order some other books that may tickle your fancy. We'll see you again in another few months.

Sincerely,
Sean Rabbitt, Chief Bunny

another **RABCO** disaster®
a rabbit valley™ company

Visit online for the new
Vast Catalog of Other Good Stuff

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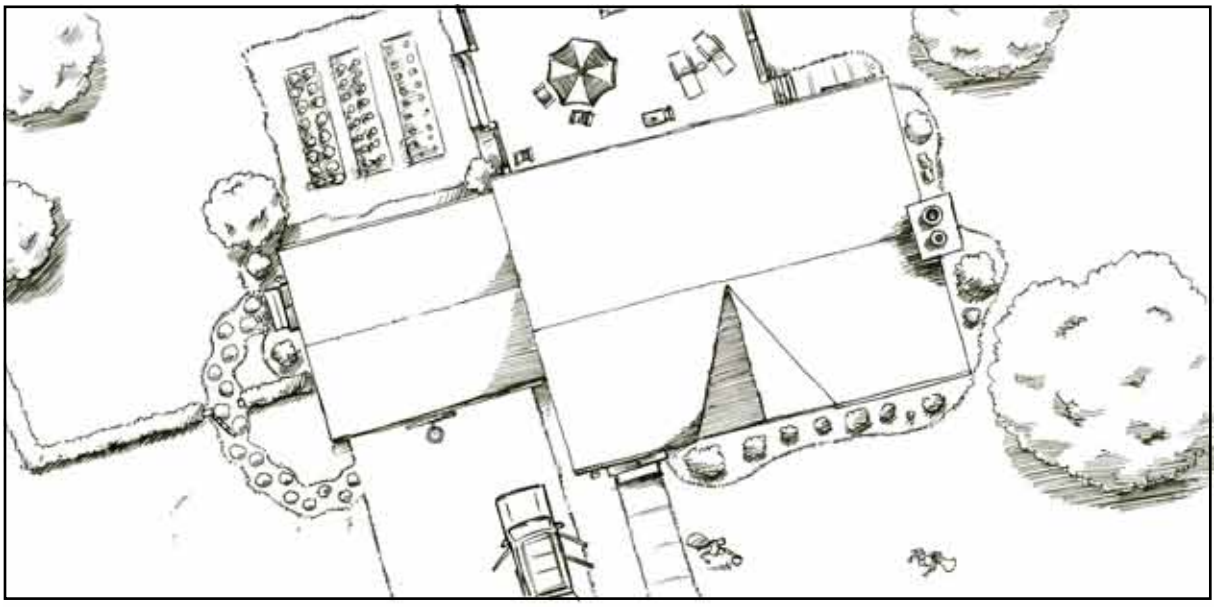
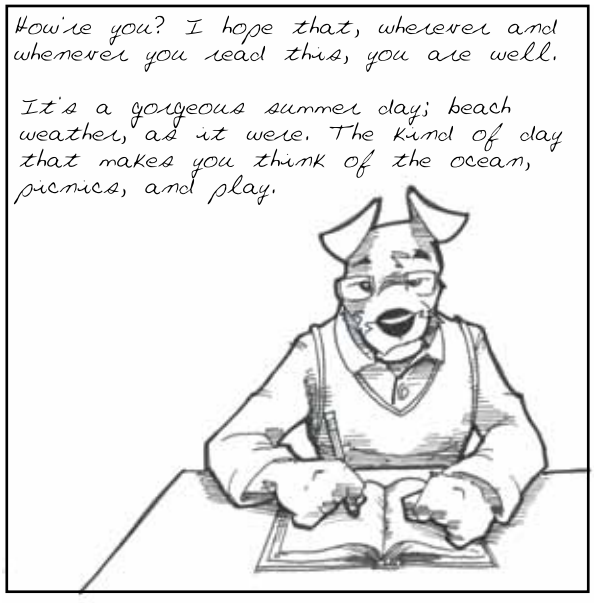
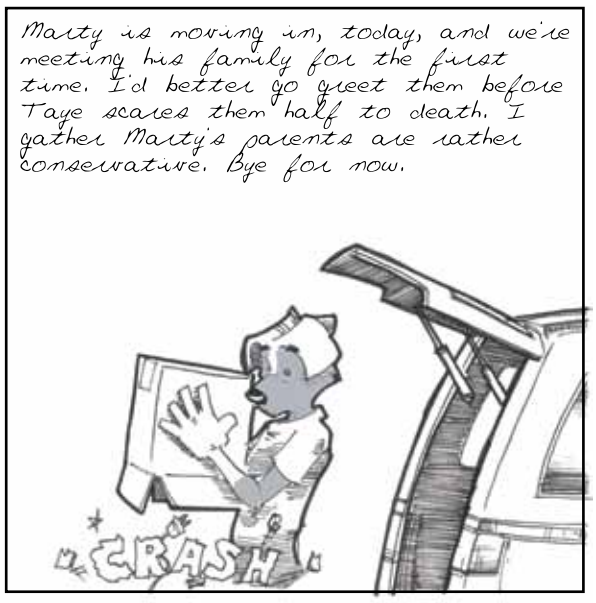


Dear Douglas


How're you? I hope that, wherever and whenever you read this, you are well.
It's a gorgeous summer day; beach weather, as it were. The kind of day that makes you think of the ocean, picnics, and play.

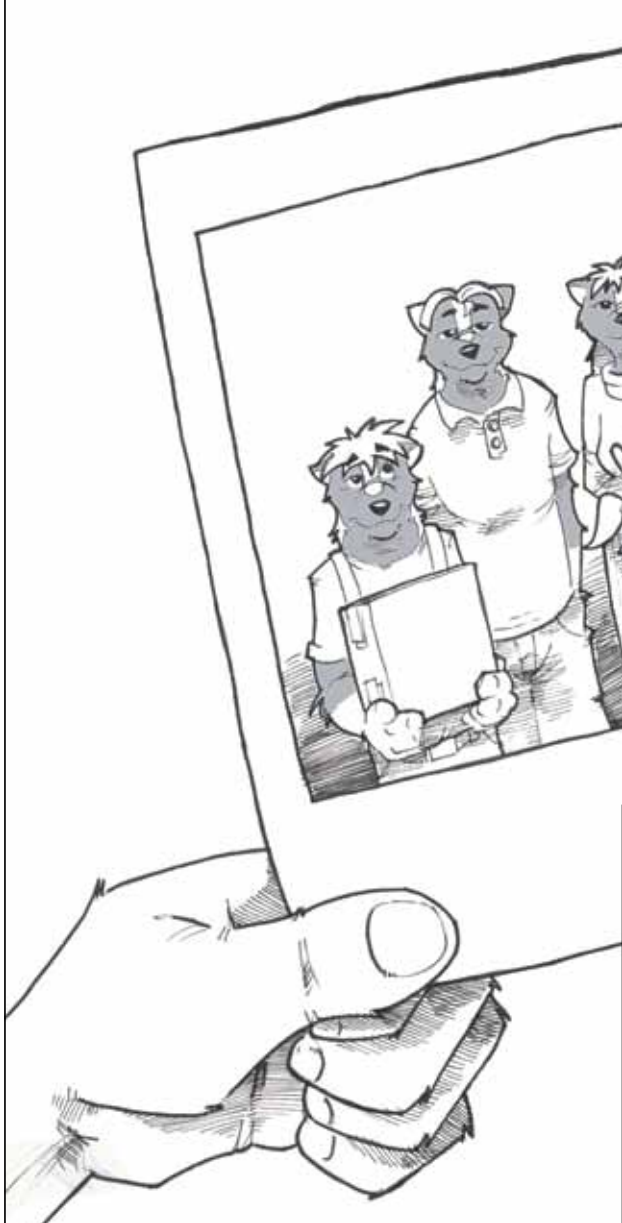

Marty is moving in, today, and we're meeting his family for the first time. I'd better go greet them before Taye scares them half to death. I gather Marty's parents are rather conservative. Bye for now.
CRASH

Hello, Marty! So good to see you back!
Hiya, Paulie. Good to see you, too. This is exciting!

And you must be Mr. Miller. Welcome!
Thank you, Mr. Mayhew. Marty's had a lot to say about you and this house. You must've made quite an impression on him.

Dad...
Please call me Paulie, Mr. Miller. No one calls me anything else, really... and the good first impressions were mutual in Marty's case. He's a charming boy.

Wait! Must catch the moment on film. Everyone say cheese!



Circles

Listen. Do You Want to Know a Secret?

Created by Steve Domanski, Scott Fabianek, and Andrew French
Script: Andy
Layout: Steve
Lettering: Steve & Andy
Pencils & Inks: Scott
Published by: Another RABCO Disaster®
A Rabbit Valley™ Comic Company
Chief Bunny: Sean Rabbitt

Hiya. Mind if I join you?
Not at all.
Thanks. I could use a break from polite company.

See, thanks so much.
Oops! *giggle* I didn't mean it like that. Sorry.

Forget about it. What's going on anyways?
Marty's folks are dropping him and his stuff off today.
Right. It's the big day. Sorry to be losing your private apartment?

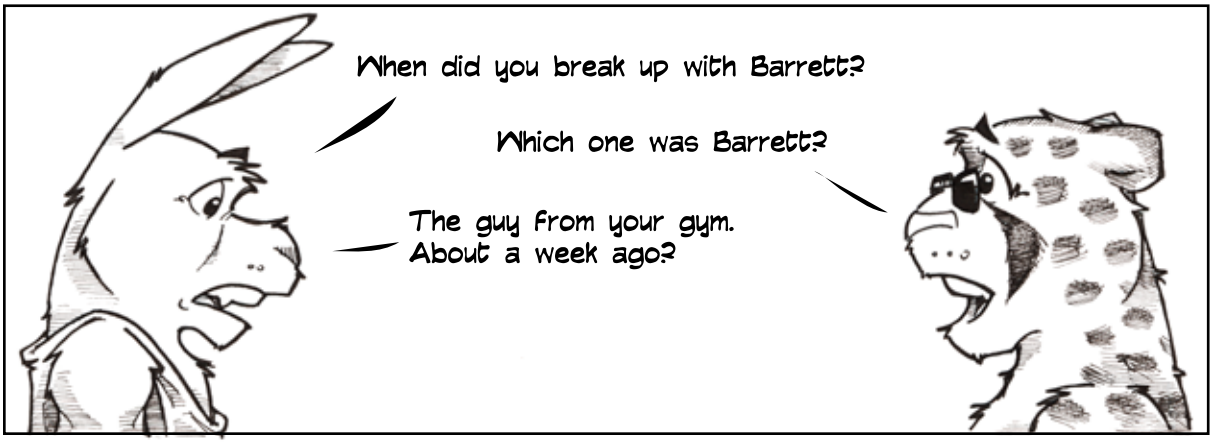
Oh, a little, I suppose. But it'll be worth it, with the money I'll be able to put away.
Yeah, I guess. But you still have to live with Marty.
I like Marty. He's sweet, thoughtful...

Oh, yeah. Hes a nice enough guy, but you couldve gotten a nicer-looking guy.
Hey! Mr. Superficial! I happen to think that Martys a pretty cute guy.
For a chubby guy, you mean?
No, in general. I think chubby guys are sexy. There's more of them to hug!

Ohhhh. Now I get it.
Get what?
I could never figure out why we never got together. You're a chubby chaser.

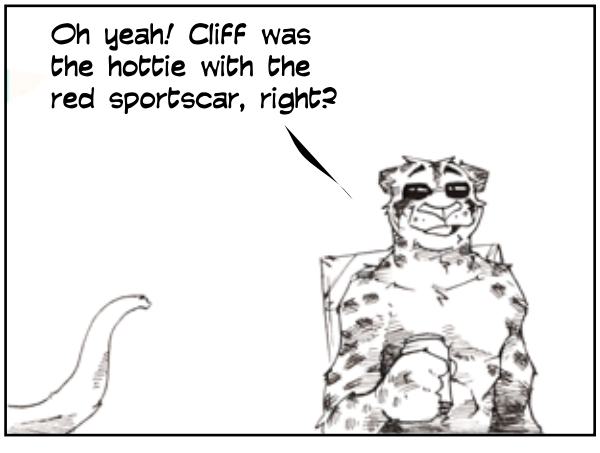
So, Ken, whore you going out with these days? That Cliff guy? Or is it Barrett?
Norris, actually. Why?

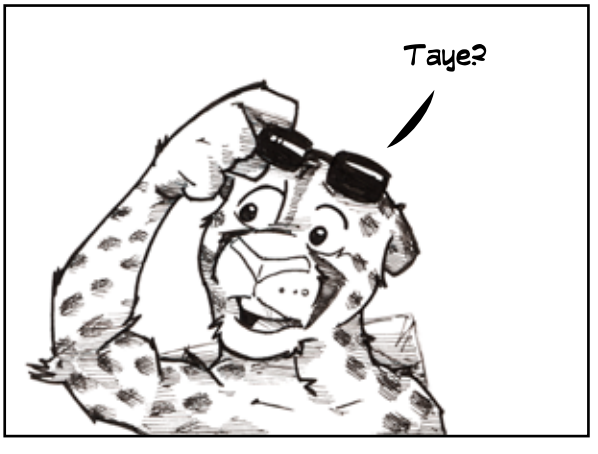
Whos Norris?
Hes new. You havent met him.


When did you break up with Barrett?
Which one was Barrett?
The guy from your gym. About a week ago?

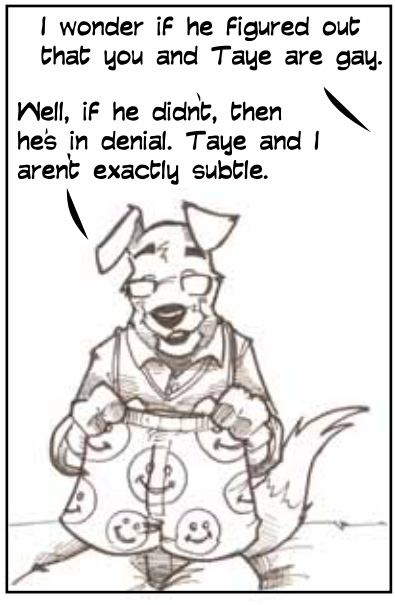
I thought that was Cliff?

That's why we never got together.


Oh yeah! Cliff was the hottie with the red sportscar, right?


Taye?

Your parents seem like a charming couple, Marty. I hope they're adjusting to the idea of you moving out?
Me too. Dad looked kind of freaked when he saw the one bed, but I told him we'd be pulling them apart today.

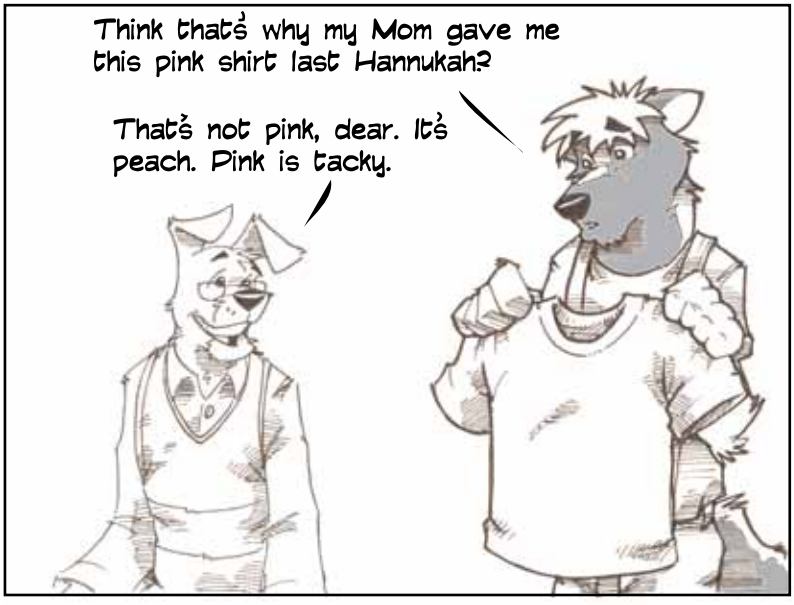

I wonder if he figured out that you and Taye are gay.
Well, if he didn't, then he's in denial. Taye and I aren't exactly subtle.

I wonder if he's thinking I am, then.
You haven't told them?

There just never seemed a good time to do it. My folks're pretty right wing about a lot of stuff. I don't know if I'll ever tell them.

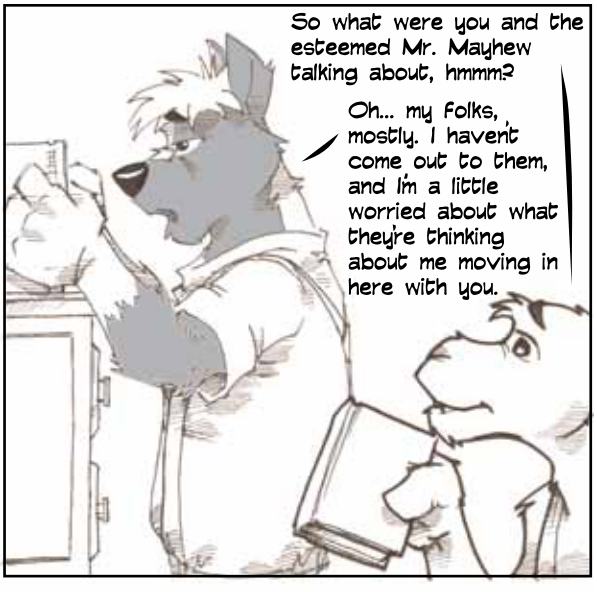
Marty, your parents love you. I could see that right off. No matter what, they're going to love you, whether you're gay, straight, bi, or whatever.

But what if Dad freaks out? Tells me I'm not his son any more? Or my Mom has a crying jag, or something? I dunno if I could handle that.
That's a bit extreme, no? Besides if your parents are at all observant, they may already suspect, or know. You don't particularly come across as gay, but parents... well.. sometimes parents just know.

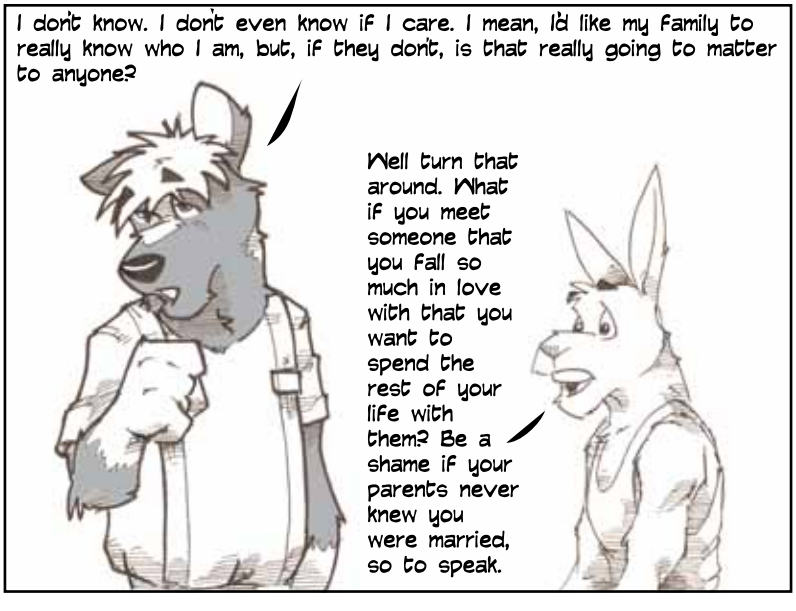

Think that's why my Mom gave me this pink shirt last Hannukah?
That's not pink, dear. It's peach. Pink is tacky.

Need any help in here, or can I shirk a bit longer?
You can take over for an old man. I need to pay some bills. And Marty? Why don't we invite your parents over to dinner next weekend? Taye can bring home some nice things from La Maison, you could make something good, and Douglas and I could make some dessert.

Thanks, Paulie. That'd be cool. At least my Mom would be able to see that I was eating okay.
Oh, she needn't fear, I think.
Be good, boys.


So what were you and the esteemed Mr. Mayhew talking about, hmmm?
Oh... my folks, mostly. I haven't come out to them, and I'm a little worried about what they're thinking about me moving in here with you.

Yeah, I thought your Dad looked kind of... uncomfortable when he saw just the one bed. But we'll get Arthur up here to help us pull em apart.
You think he suspects you now?

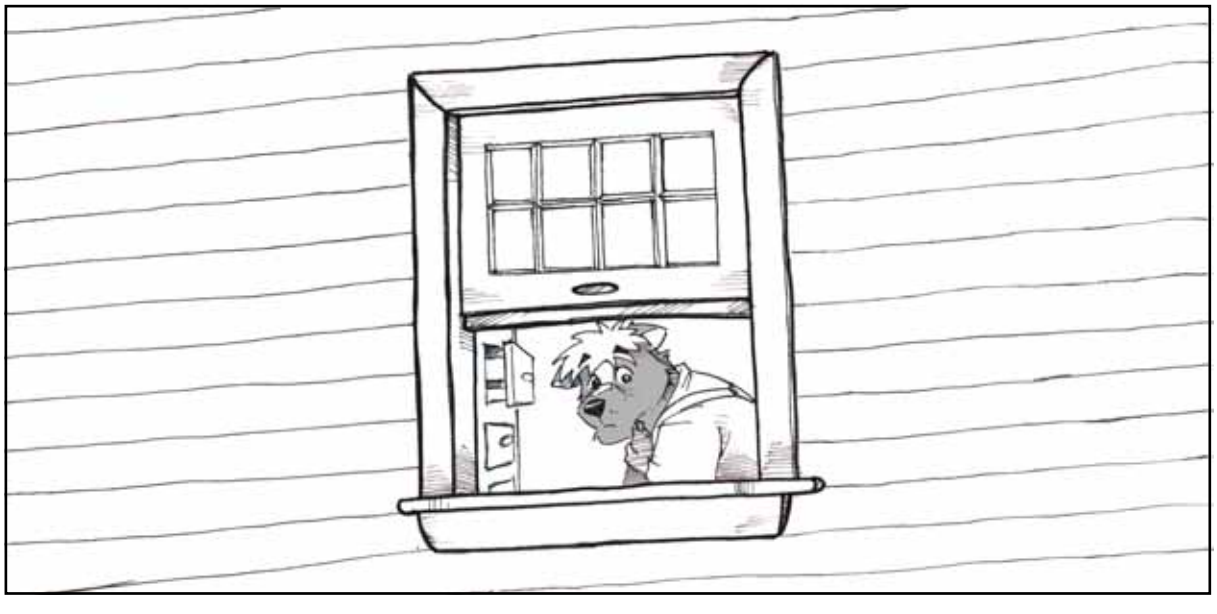

I don't know. I don't even know if I care. I mean, I'd like my family to really know who I am, but, if they don't, is that really going to matter to anyone?
Well turn that around. What if you meet someone that you fall so much in love with that you want to spend the rest of your life with them? Be a shame if your parents never knew you were married, so to speak.

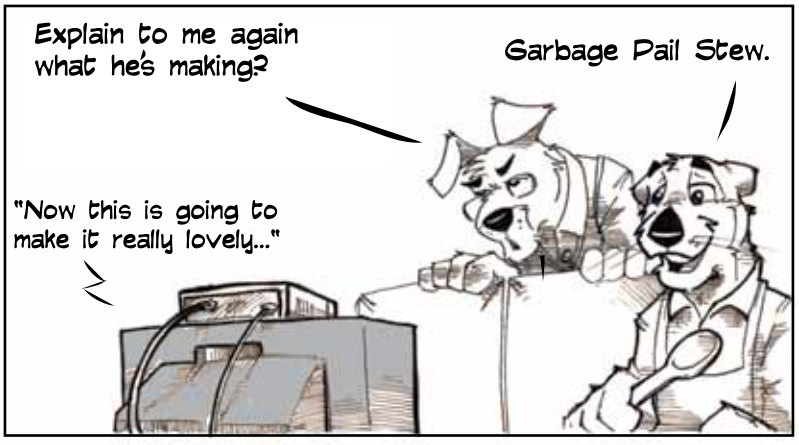
Well, I just don't know. I don't want to cause friction. What if one of them freaks out, and the other doesn't?
Then one of your parents has a problem. Who do you think would freak? Your Dad?

Yeah, I love him, but he can get very uptight about some stuff, and I worry this'll... I dunno... really be bad for him.
Send him over the edge into a nervous breakdown or a heart attack or something?

No, no. I... oh, I don't know. Let's not worry about it. Im gonna get my computer set up.
Scool. I gotta split for work anyhow. If you get a chance, you can ask Arthur to come up and help you with the beds. He helped me fix them together in the first place.

Okay, Taye. Thanks for your help.



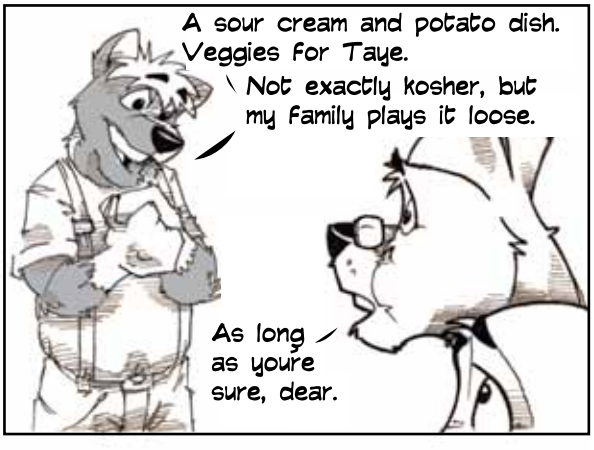

Explain to me again what he's making?
Garbage Pail Stew.
"Now this is going to make it really lovely..."

But he just added Apricots!?
You question the Urban Peasant?

None of us would dare, dear. Just please don't cook whatever it is he's making.
Hey! I just watch him to get a feel of what can be done.

As long as it remains hypothetical.
Philistine.

So we're set for Saturday?
Yes, dear. Taye assures me there is an exquisite beef and noodle dish being prepared at La Maison, and he's promised enough for ten. What are you making, dear?

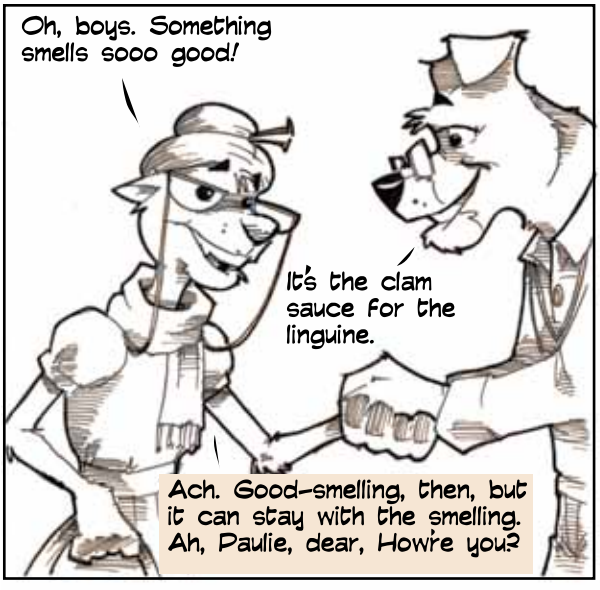

A sour cream and potato dish. Veggies for Taye.
Not exactly kosher, but my family plays it loose.
As long as you're sure, dear.

And what are we making, Douglas?
We? Aren't you afraid I'll slip some apricots in?

Don't be silly. You could cook rings around the Urban Peasant any day.
Well... That's true. Honesty must be rewarded. How about some kind of chocolate pudding cake?

YOO HOO! ANYONE HOME?
Mrs. Nussbaum!

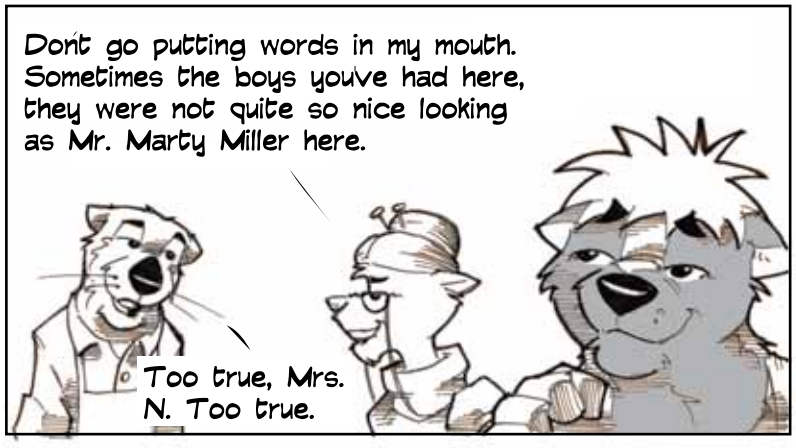
Mrs. Nussbaum?
We're up here, Mrs. Nussbaum! Won't you come up and join us?


Oh, boys. Something smells sooo good!
It's the clam sauce for the linguine.
Ach. Good-smelling, then, but it can stay with the smelling. Ah, Paulie, dear, How're you?

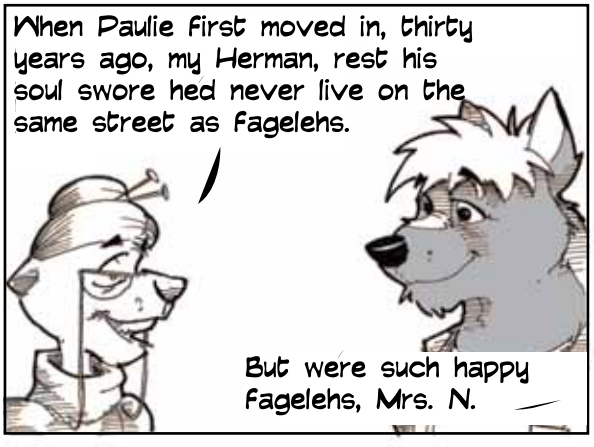
In the pink, Mrs. N. Allow me to introduce Marty Miller.
Marty, this is Mrs. Nussbaum who lives just down the street.

Ah, Marty Miller. A pleasure to finally meet you. Paulie's told me all about you.
Very nice to meet you, Mrs. Nussbaum.

Ach, such nice manners. Finally a bit of class in the house.
Lovely to see you, too, Mrs. N.


Dont go putting words in my mouth. Sometimes the boys youve had here, they were not quite so nice looking as Mr. Marty Miller here.
Too true, Mrs. N. Too true.

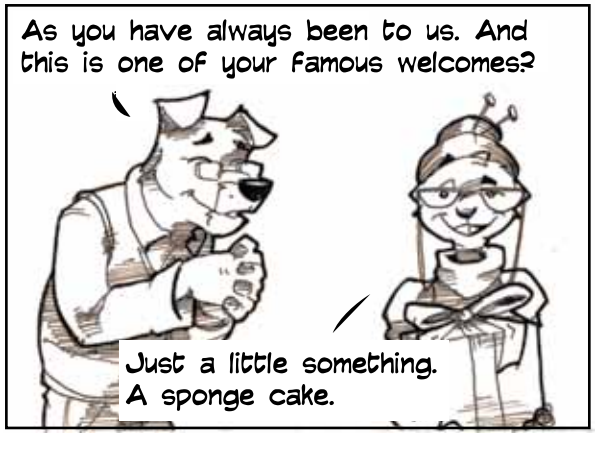
So youre gay of course, Marty? I know the boys who come to live here, theyre gay. And thats fine.
Thats us, Mrs. N.

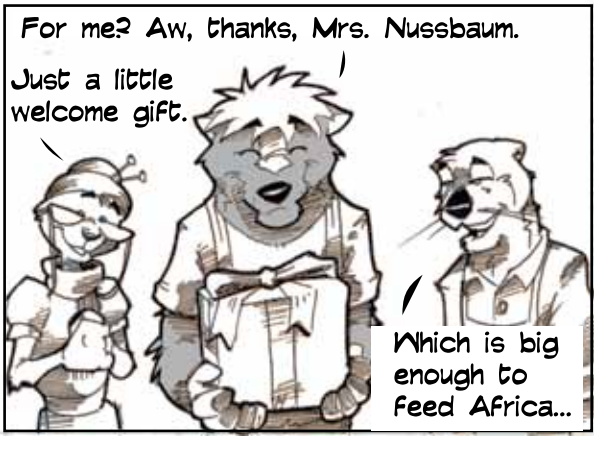

When Paulie first moved in, thirty years ago, my Herman, rest his soul swore hed never live on the same street as fagelehs.
But were such happy fagelehs, Mrs. N.

When you call yourself gay, what else should you be?
Too true, Mrs. N. Too true.

Most of us know, of course, that youre just people. And some of you nice people who have lots to share.
Baking recipes.

Teasing, always. But still good friends.


As you have always been to us. And this is one of your famous welcomes?
Just a little something. A sponge cake.


For me? Aw, thanks, Mrs. Nussbaum.
Just a little welcome gift.
Which is big enough to feed Africa...

Ach. Someone isn't tending to his clams and sauce.
Nyah!

Well, boys I can't stay. I have to pick my grandson, Joshua, up from band practice. Such a very great pleasure, Marty Miller.
Be good, Paulie. Take care of yourself.
Always, Mrs. N.

And Paulie? Make sure Douglas takes care of his clams and sauce.
Yes, Mrs. N. Will do.

Such a remarkable woman. If I were straight...
She's the best. Wish more folks in the neighborhood were like her...
Carter Allen for one...

She seems really nice, and really accepting. Speaking of which, you know I'm thinking more and more about coming out to my folks.

I think that's the best idea, Marty. My mother died when I was a teenager, and I always regretted never getting a chance to tell her. So, just before I left for America, I told my Dad. I wanted him to realize that I love him, and for him to know who I was.
Did that go well?

It went well enough. But you have to imagine this tall hulk of a man weeping because his own bonny boy is going away to America...to be a homosexual, no less.
Jeez.

Yes. I'll never forget it. He leaned down, and he took my hands in his.
And he looked into my eyes. And with his brogue all thick with emotion, he said...

"Ach, son. I know how ye feel. I've been oot on th' boats, son, and I know what it's like...
But it isn't love, son!"

Your Dad...said that?
Oh...oh, God...yes, he sure did. Hee!

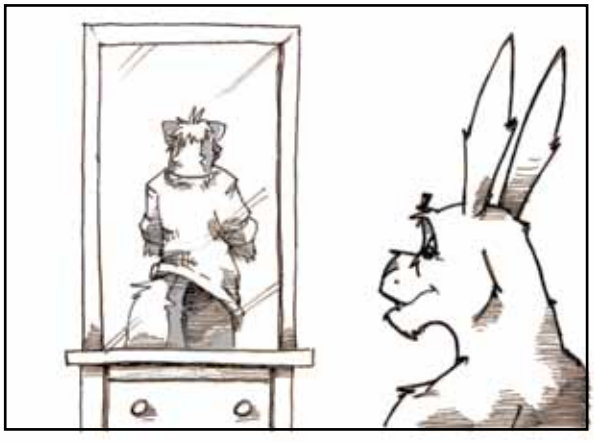
Oh, man! I can't believe it!
So, there you have it. Are you going to come out?
Well, not on Saturday.
Fair enough.

Okay, who wants some?
Me!
Me, too!

Well, Arthur says he doesn't have the right tool to pull the beds apart. So I guess we have to sleep with the beds together...at least for tonight.
That's okay. I don't mind the closeness...

Unless it bothers you?
Not really, I guess. Arthur says he can fix it this weekend.

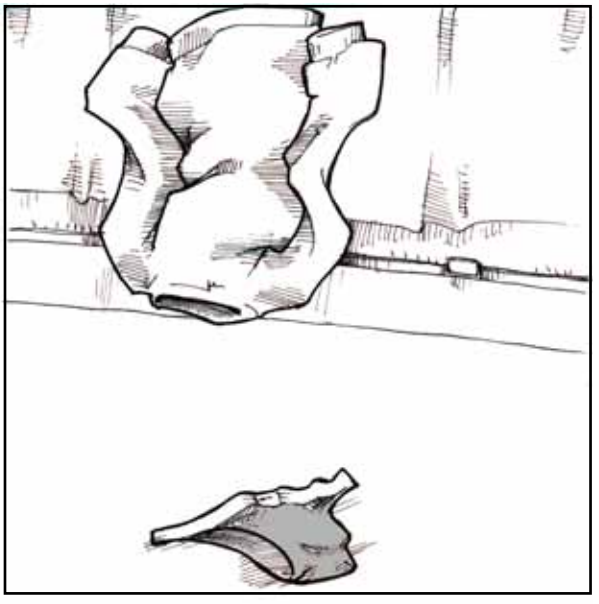
No problem, then.
Okay. Gonna brush my teeth.
I'll alert the media.
Huh? Oh...heh. Yeah.



Did you used to wear that sweatshirt to bed at home?
Huh?

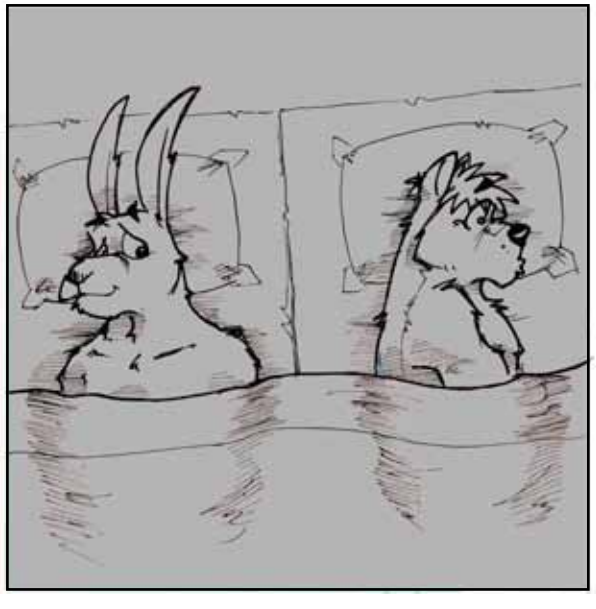
Was that what you wore for p.j.s back home?
Well...no. I didn't really used to wear anything.

Well, were roomies, Marty. Whether our beds are together, or not, there's nothing wrong with sleeping naked in the same room, right?
Um...no...not really. But since the beds are together...I thought you'd prefer...?

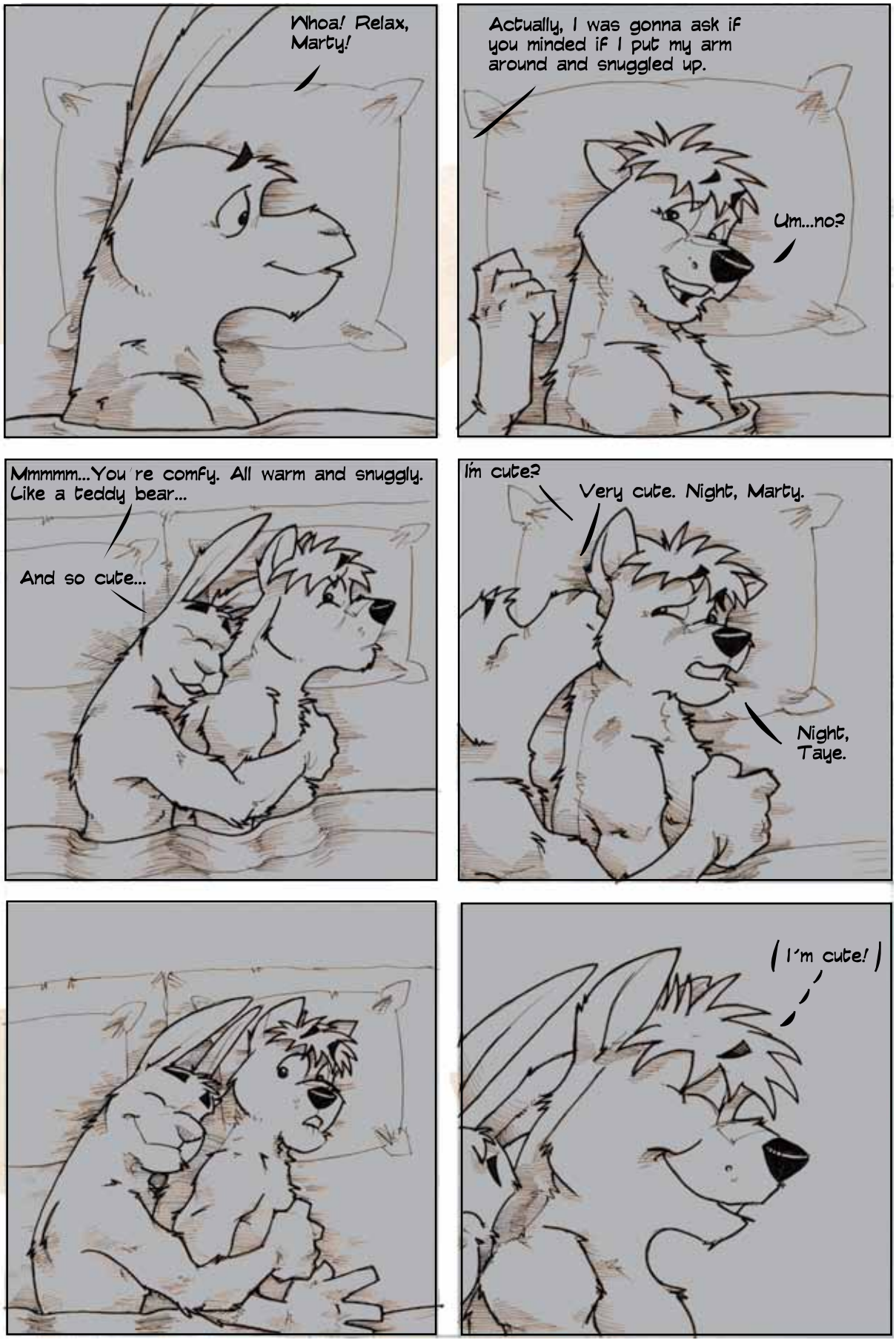


All set with the lights?
Sure.

Well...good night.
Night.
CLICK



Marty...
I'm sorry! I can't help it! I'm not used to sleeping in bed with someone! Especially naked!
I can't help fidgeting! I think I snore, too! You must hate me!


Whoa! Relax, Marty!
Actually, I was gonna ask if you minded if I put my arm around and snuggled up.
Um...no?
Mmmmm...You're comfy. All warm and snuggly. Like a teddy bear...
And so cute...
I'm cute?
Very cute. Night, Marty.
Night, Taye.
(I'm cute!)

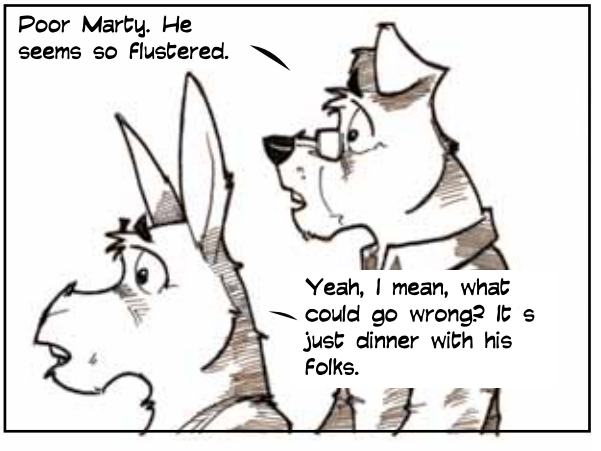
DING-DONG

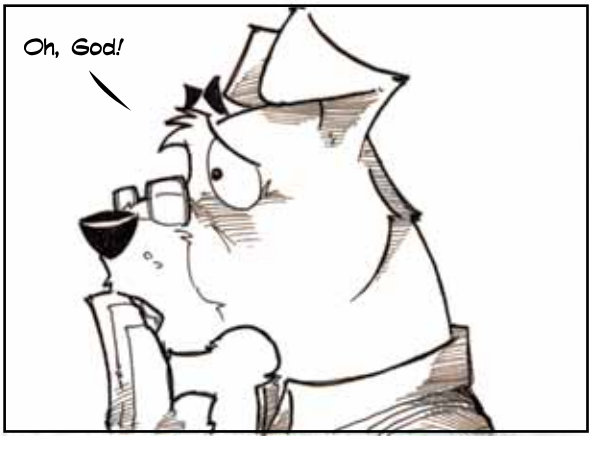
They're heeeeeere.
Oh, God!

It'll be fine, dear.
Want me to get it?
Don't be silly, Taye. Marty wants to answer the door as Master of his own home. Don't you, Marty?

Oh, God.
Uh-oh. Meltdown.
Uh...maybe you should get it, Taye.

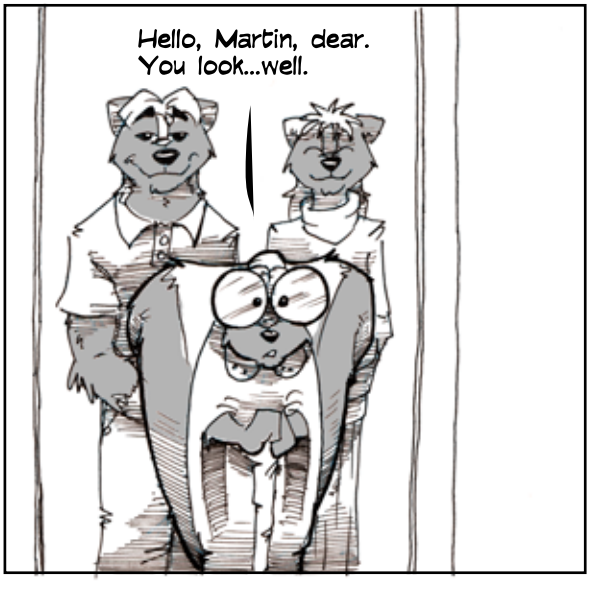
N-no...
I'll get it.


Poor Marty. He seems so flustered.
Yeah, I mean, what could go wrong? It's just dinner with his folks.


Oh, God!

Hi, Mom. Hi, Dad. Hi...

G-grandma?!


Hello, Martin, dear.
You look...well.

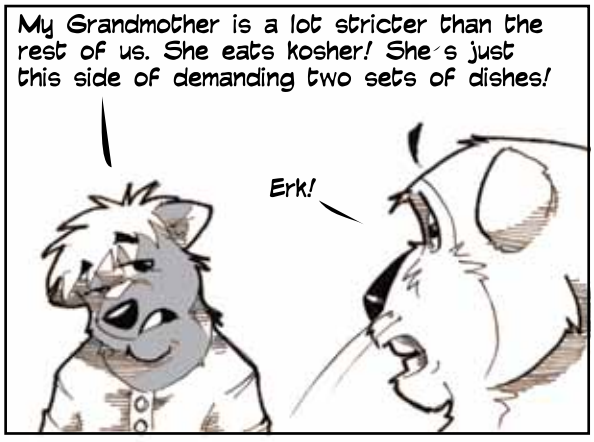
It s a...nice surprise
to see you, Grandma.
Won´t you all
come in?

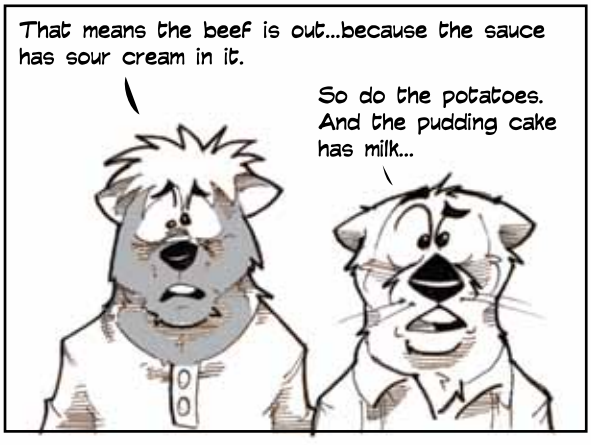
Thank you, Marty.
Nice shirt,
son. Pink
suits you.

It´s not pink.
It´s peach.

Well, um...Mom, Dad, you already met Paulie and Taye. And...that's Douglas, who's helping me cook.
And...um...everyone, some of you met my Mom and Dad. And this...this is my Grandma.
Well, hello! We weren't expecting you, but you're most certainly welcome.
Oh, why thank you, young man.
Please, call me Paulie. Everyone does.
And you must call me Francine.
Pleasure to see you again, Mr. Miller.
Likewise, Taye.
Just gonna check on dinner...

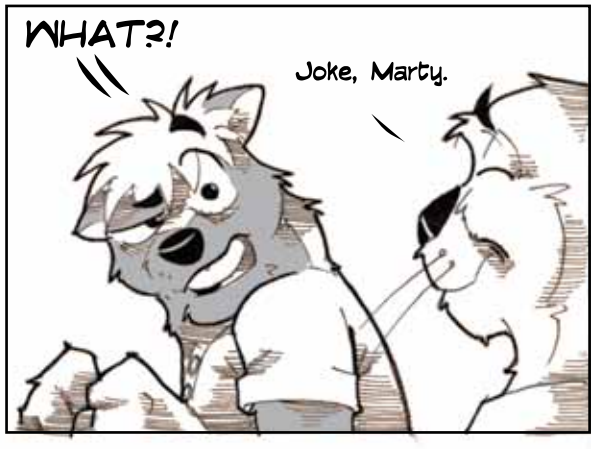
Oh my God! What are we gonna do?
What? What's wrong?


My Grandmother is a lot stricter than the rest of us. She eats kosher! She's just this side of demanding two sets of dishes!
Erk!


That means the beef is out...because the sauce has sour cream in it.
So do the potatoes. And the pudding cake has milk...

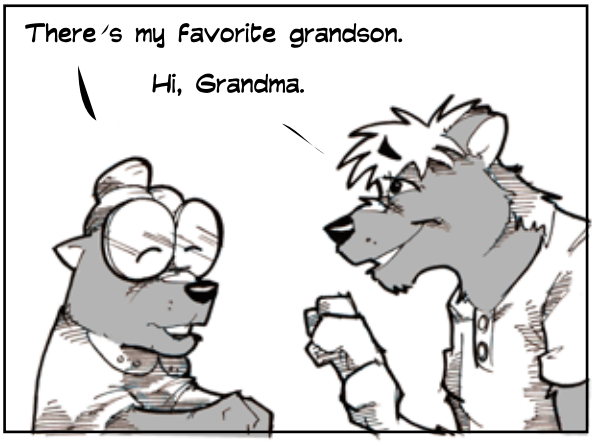
Well, that's okay, because it's a seperate course. But the rest...oh, God! Why did they they have to bring Grandma?
Don't panic. I've got plenty of food upstairs. You entertain them while I run up and figure out what we're having.

Right. Thanks, Douglas.
No problem. And don't worry. I saw this once on "The Urban Peasant".

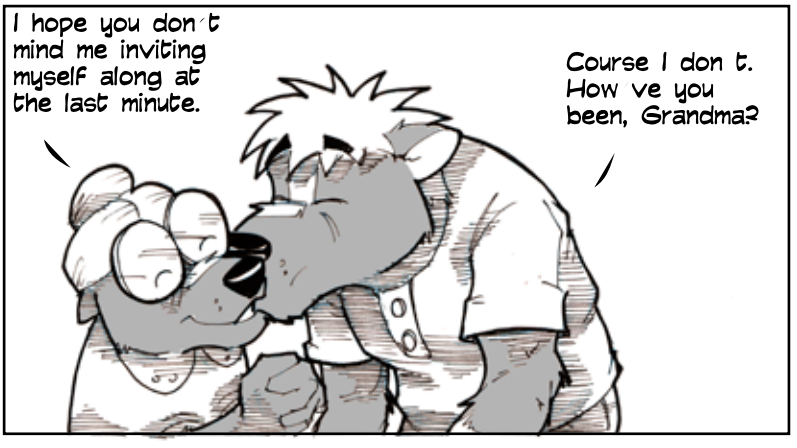

WHAT?!
Joke, Marty.

If I survive this, remind me to hate you.
Will do!

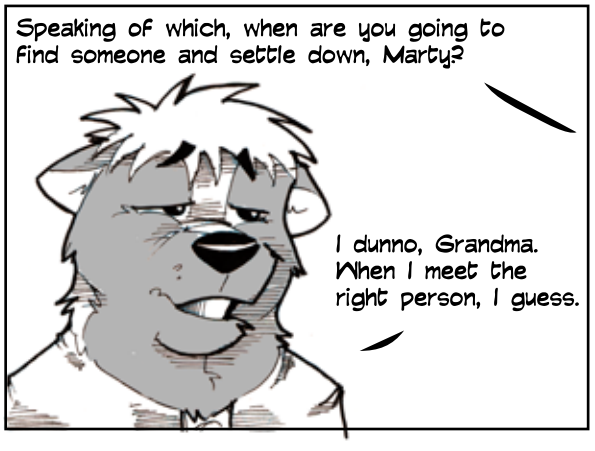
Dinner will be served in just a teensy bit.

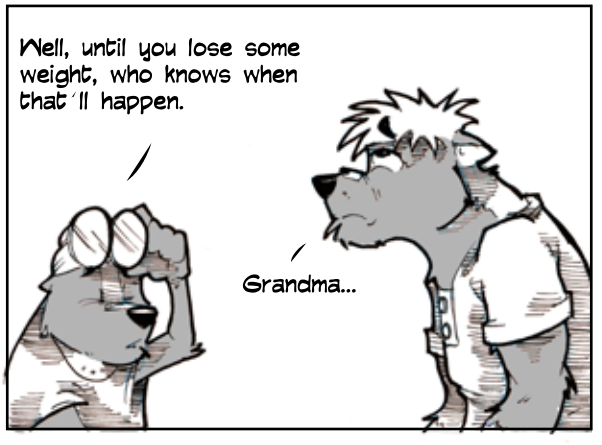

There's my favorite grandson.
Hi, Grandma.

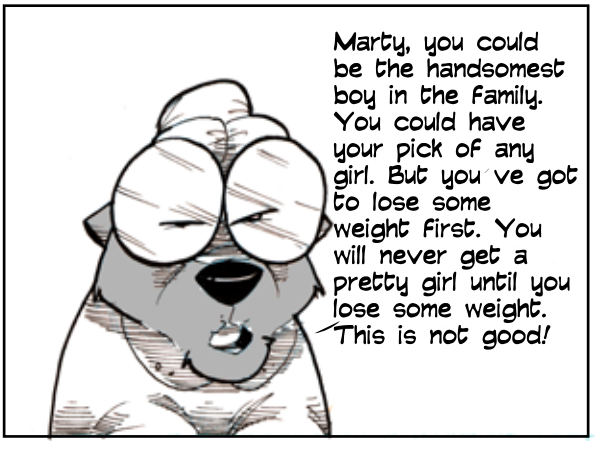
Take my seat, Marty.
I'll just pop in to keep Douglas company.
When do I get my kiss? I didn't get my kiss.

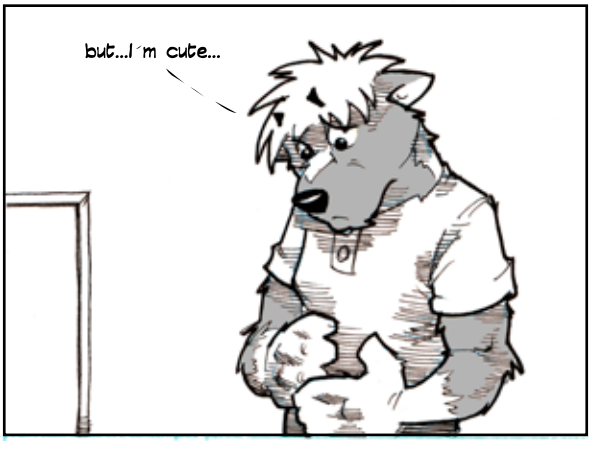

I hope you don't mind me inviting myself along at the last minute.
Course I don't. How've you been, Grandma?

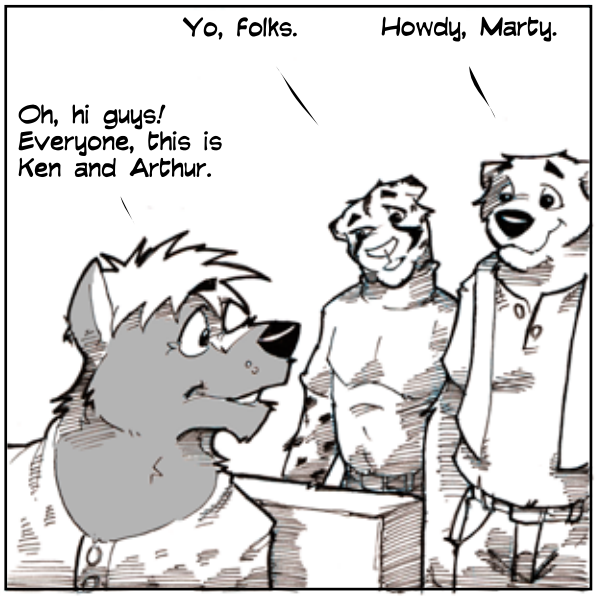
Good, good. Well, not so well, you know, but okay. Wondering when I'll have great grandkids.
Uh...


Speaking of which, when are you going to find someone and settle down, Marty?
I dunno, Grandma. When I meet the right person, I guess.


Well, until you lose some weight, who knows when that'll happen.
Grandma...


Marty, you could be the handsomest boy in the family. You could have your pick of any girl. But you've got to lose some weight first. You will never get a pretty girl until you lose some weight. This is not good!


but...I'm cute...


Yo, folks.
Howdy, Marty.
Oh, hi guys! Everyone, this is Ken and Arthur.

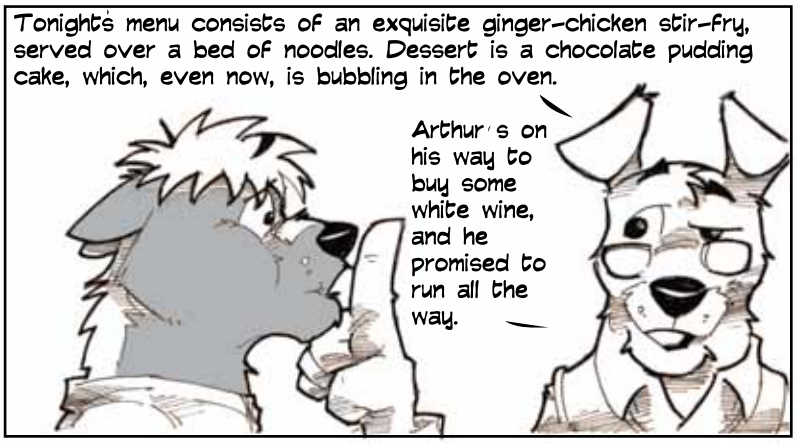
How's it hangin', Mr. Miller?
Excuse me?
Sorry we're late. We were picking up wine, and I'm pretty picky, especially with reds.

Arthur, could you coordinate the wine with Paulie and Douglas...in the kitchen?
But, Marty, this is one of the best reds on the market...
We might not need red...
Huh?
Douglas can explain.

So what do you do for work, Mr. Miller?
Well, I do some work with art galleries...
Oh yeah? Any photo exhibitions? I've been in a few photo shoots for artists...

Really? Anything I might've seen?
Oh, I kinda doubt it...
Why is this happening to me?

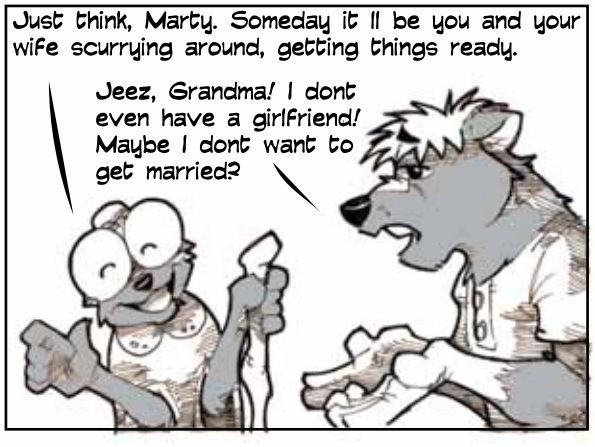
Everything okay out here?
Not really! What are we gonna...?


Tonight's menu consists of an exquisite ginger-chicken stir-fry, served over a bed of noodles. Dessert is a chocolate pudding cake, which, even now, is bubbling in the oven.
Arthur's on his way to buy some white wine, and he promised to run all the way.

So, go spend quality time with your family and leave the rest to your fairy godfathers.
But...
But what?

Nothing. Thank you all. You guys are the best.
No problem, dear. Try to relax, okay?
I'll try.

Everything going okay? I hope I haven't caused any fuss. I could help out, if they need me.
No, Grandma. They're all set. They don't need any help.

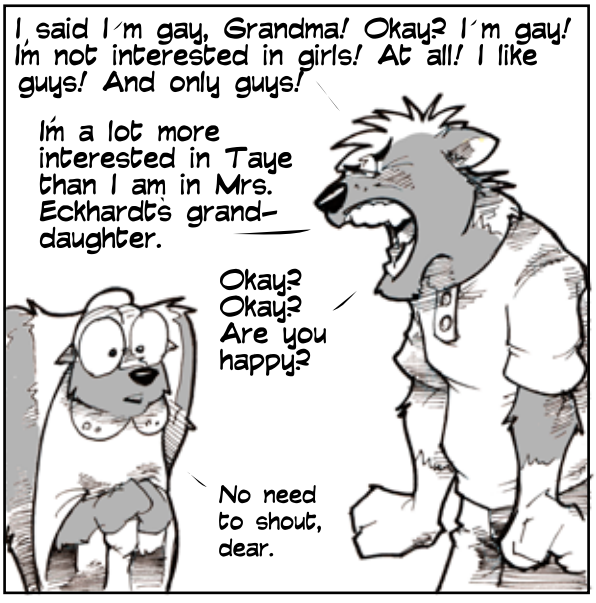

Just think, Marty. Someday it'll be you and your wife scurrying around, getting things ready.
Jeez, Grandma! I don't even have a girlfriend! Maybe I don't want to get married?

What? Why ever not?
Well, maybe I'm... maybe I just... don't want to.

You're just young, dear. Someday, you'll find the right girl, and you'll want to settle down.
No, Grandma...I don't think so.
Oh! Don't be so silly, Marty. Of course you will!

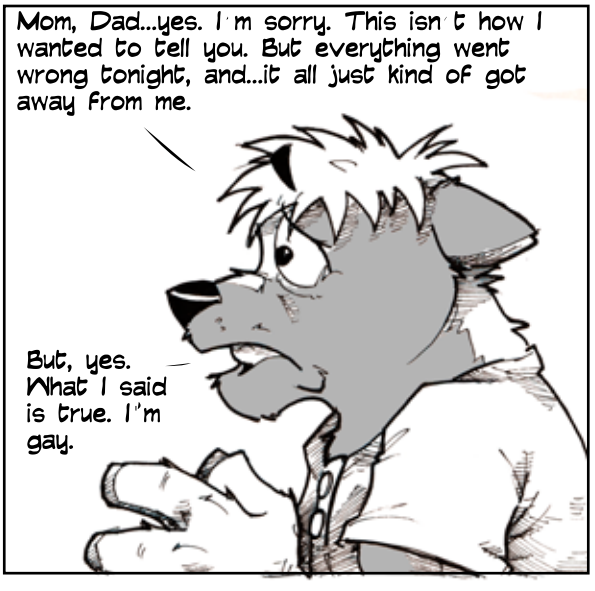
I'm not being silly, I'm just...oh, never mind.
Of course you're being silly, Marty. Who wouldn't want to get married?

What's all the fuss over here?
Oh, Marty's just being silly.
I'm not being silly! I just don't want to get married!
You don't want to get married? Why not?
Oh, Ralph. Marty's still so young.
Mom, please. I'm not that young. I just dont want to marry anyone.
See? Isn't that silly?
Uh-oh. I think Marty's feeling ganged-up on...
Maybe we should rescue him?
Well, my neighbor, Mrs. Eckhardt? She has a lovely grand-daughter, just about your age. I have her number here, someplace...
Grandma, I'm not interested!
We'd better intervene. Marty looks like he's about to blow.
Mmm...
But you don t even know her, yet. How could you know whether or not you d be interested in her?
Because...because I'm gay, Grandma.
What? What? Did you say you're a goy?


I said I'm gay, Grandma! Okay? I'm gay! Im not interested in girls! At all! I like guys! And only guys!
Im a lot more interested in Taye than I am in Mrs. Eckhardts grand-daughter.
Okay? Okay? Are you happy?
No need to shout, dear.

Oh, dear.

You're...gay?

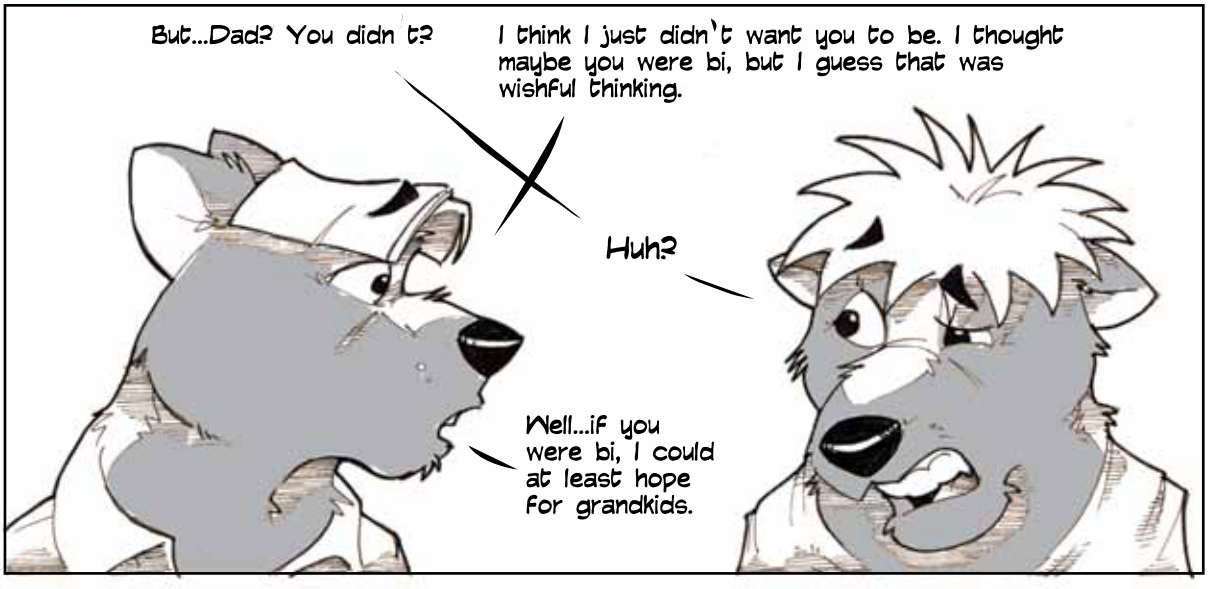

Mom, Dad...yes. I'm sorry. This isn't how I wanted to tell you. But everything went wrong tonight, and...it all just kind of got away from me.
But, yes. What I said is true. I'm gay.

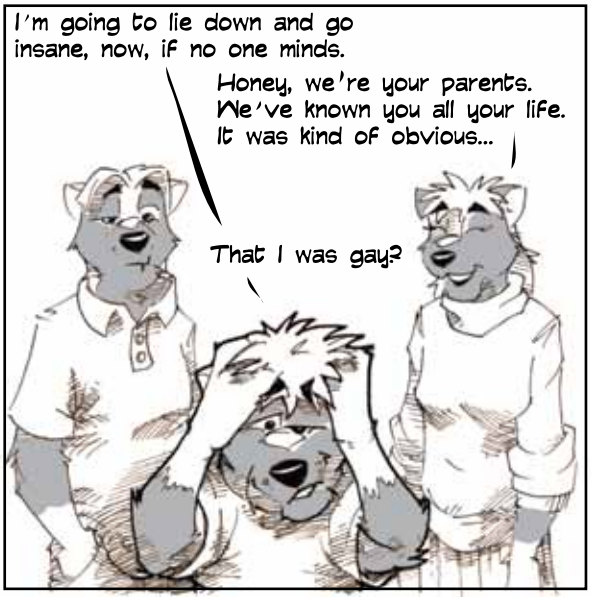
You're sure? No interest in girls at all?
Im sure. I have no real interest in girls.

Pay up, Ralph.
Damn.
What?!

I don t understand. You...you had a bet? On whether or not I was gay?

Something like that. Your Dad just refused to believe me, but I knew you were gay.
You...you did?
Marty, honey, I m your mother. Of course I knew.


But...Dad? You didn t?
I think I just didn't want you to be. I thought maybe you were bi, but I guess that was wishful thinking.
Huh?
Well...if you were bi, I could at least hope for grandkids.

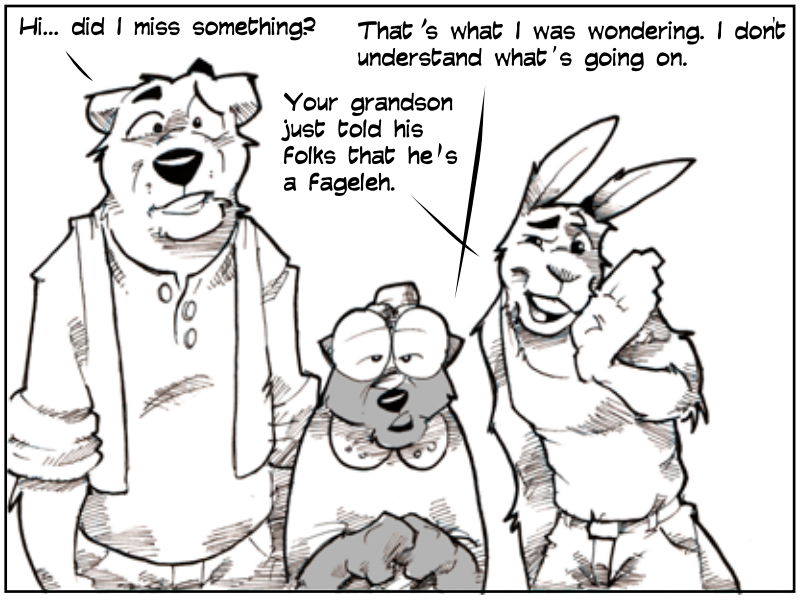

I'm going to lie down and go insane, now, if no one minds.
Honey, we're your parents. We've known you all your life. It was kind of obvious...
That I was gay?

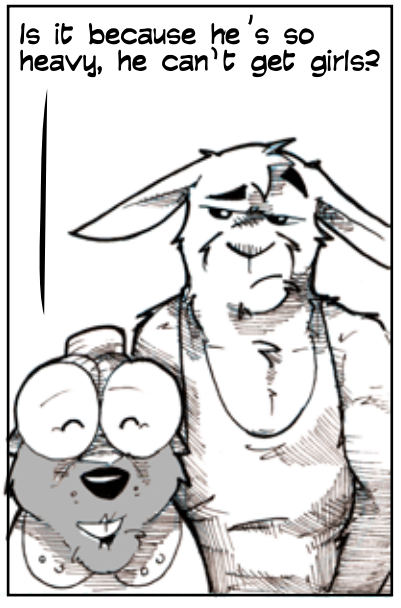
That you weren't interested in girls. Remember Sarah? You took her to the prom, and then ducked her calls for days afterwards. That started me thinking...
Guess that makes sense.

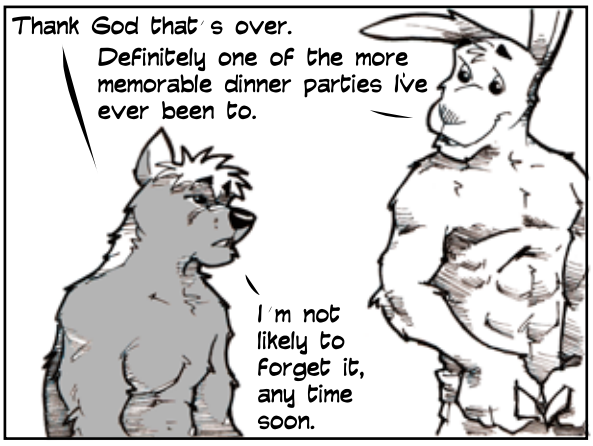
So, after seeing that kind of thing for a few years, we got to know there was something special about you. If this is who you are, then this is who you are. But remember, honey, we love you, and we just want you to be happy.
That's right, Marty.

I am happy. I'm really happy, and I love you guys, too.

I love you both so much!

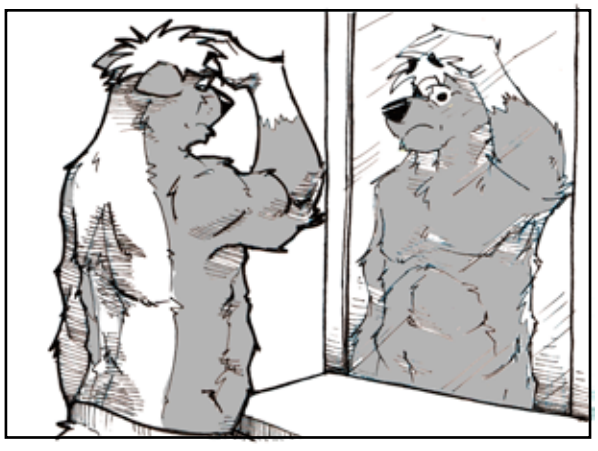

Hi... did I miss something?
That's what I was wondering. I don't understand what's going on.
Your grandson just told his folks that he's a fageleh.


Is it because he's so heavy, he can't get girls?

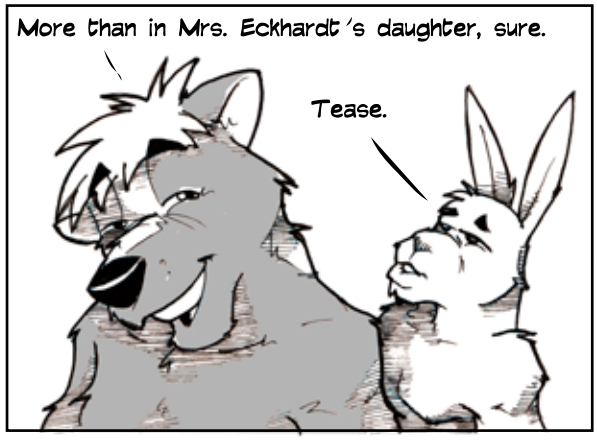

Thank God that's over.
Definitely one of the more memorable dinner parties I've ever been to.
I'm not likely to forget it, any time soon.

But how do you feel?
I feel good. I'm glad I told them. Just wish it coulda gone a bit more smoothly.

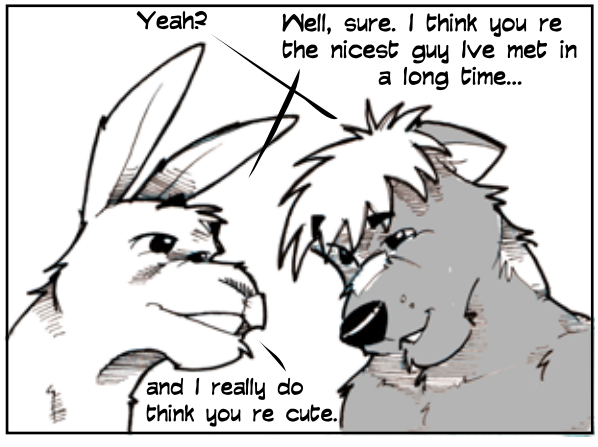
But...?
Weight of the world off my shoulders.



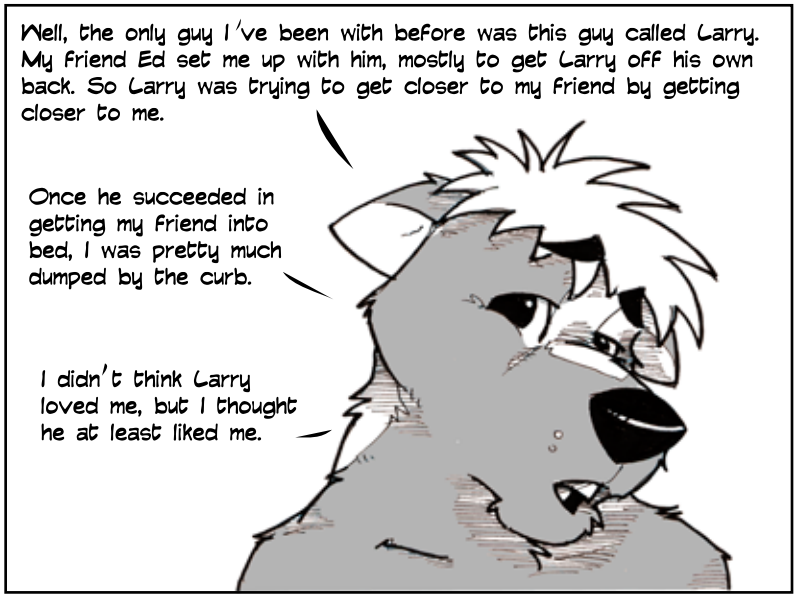
So...did you mean it?
Mean what?
You said you were interested in me.

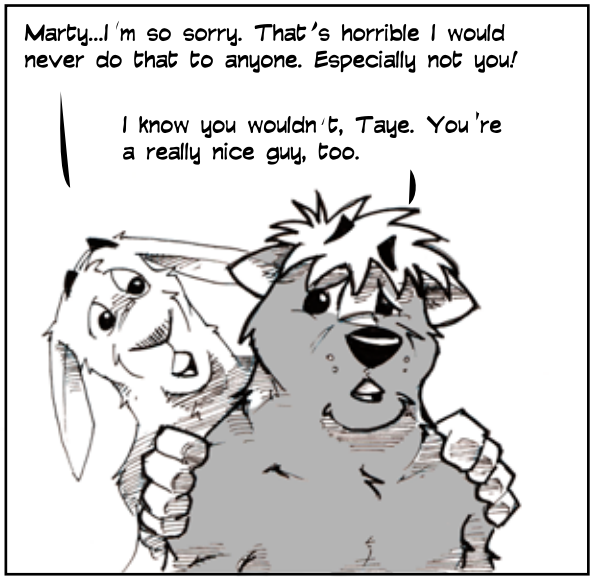

More than in Mrs. Eckhardt's daughter, sure.
Tease.

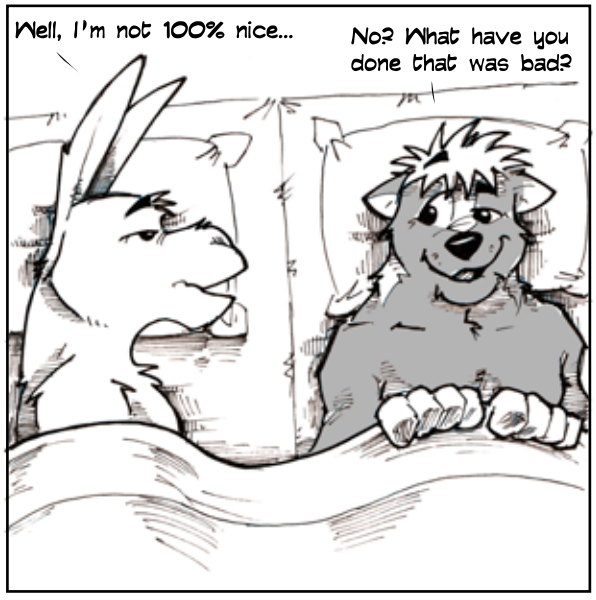
Yes, I'm interested in you.
Well, I'm interested in you, too.

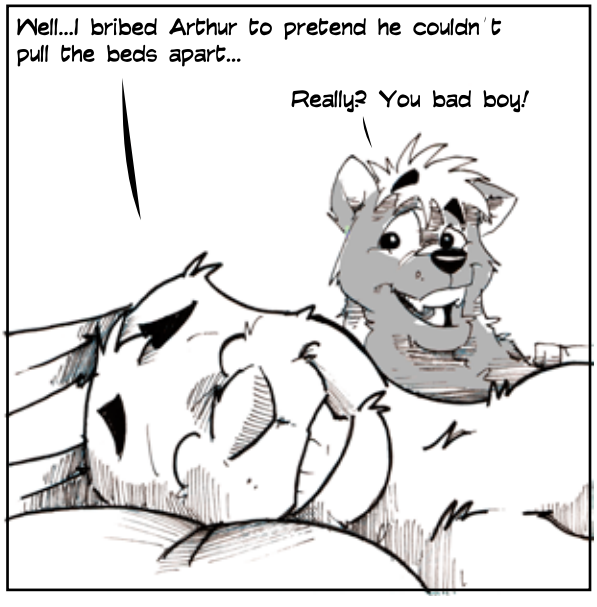

Yeah?
Well, sure. I think you're the nicest guy I've met in a long time...
and I really do think you're cute.

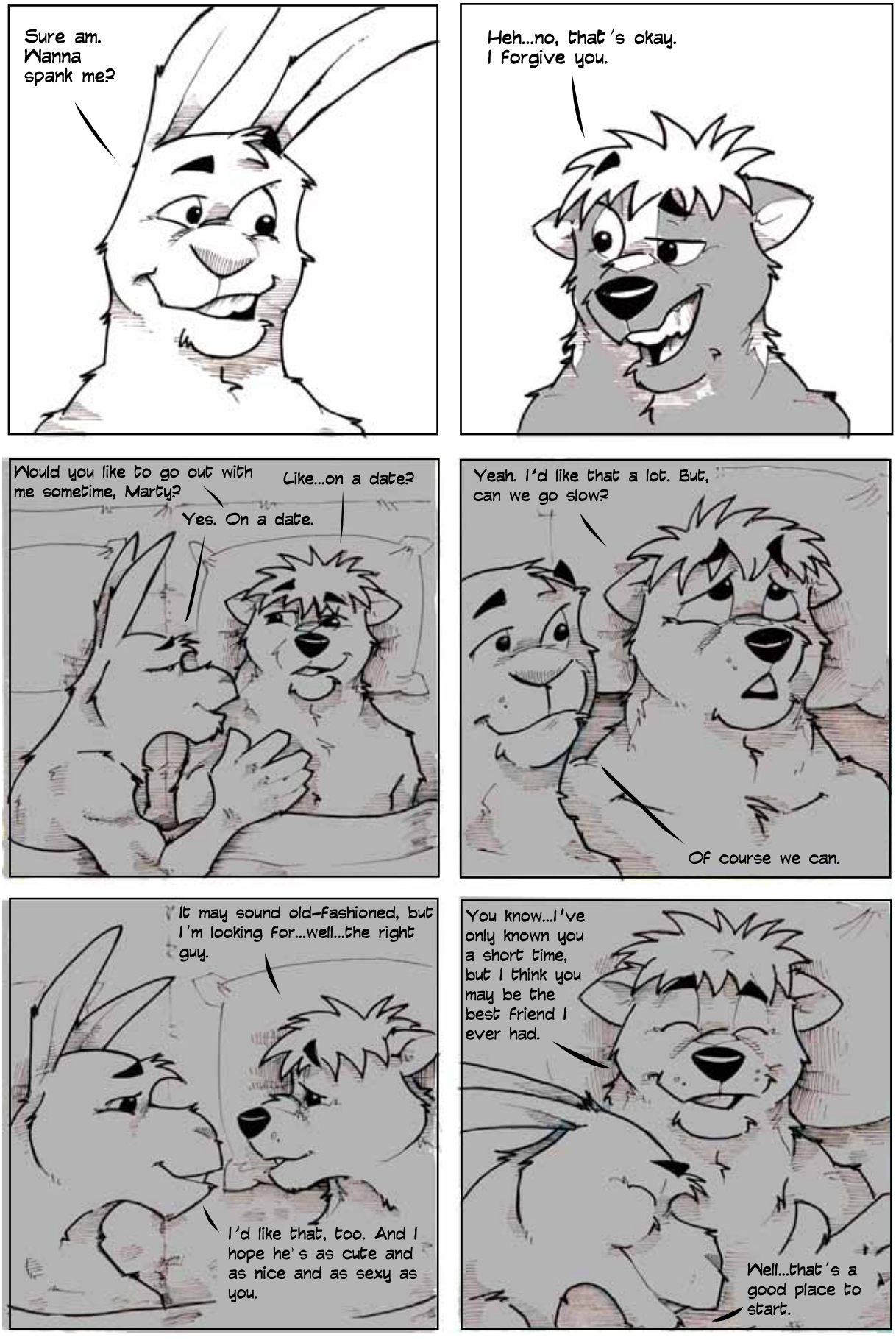
No one ever called me cute before.
No one?


Well, the only guy I've been with before was this guy called Larry. My friend Ed set me up with him, mostly to get Larry off his own back. So Larry was trying to get closer to my friend by getting closer to me.
Once he succeeded in getting my friend into bed, I was pretty much dumped by the curb.
I didn't think Larry loved me, but I thought he at least liked me.

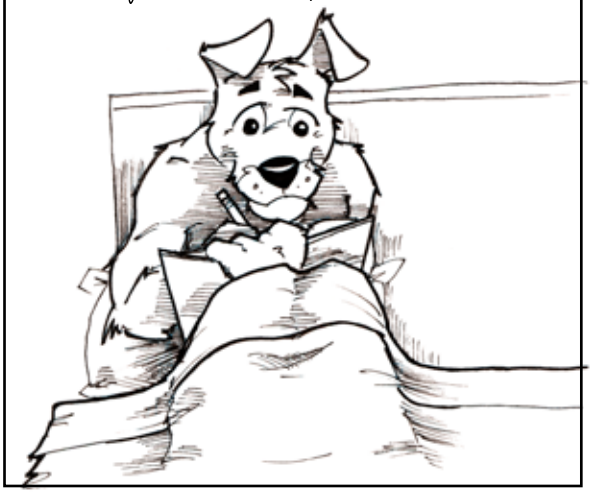

Marty...I'm so sorry. That's horrible I would never do that to anyone. Especially not you!
I know you wouldn't, Taye. You're a really nice guy, too.


Well, I'm not 100% nice...
No? What have you done that was bad?


Well...I bribed Arthur to pretend he couldn't pull the beds apart...
Really? You bad boy!


Sure am. Wanna spank me?
Heh...no, that's okay. I forgive you.
Would you like to go out with me sometime, Marty?
Like...on a date?
Yes. On a date.
Yeah. I'd like that a lot. But, can we go slow?
Of course we can.
It may sound old-fashioned, but I'm looking for...well...the right guy.
I'd like that, too. And I hope he's as cute and as nice and as sexy as you.
You know...I've only known you a short time, but I think you may be the best friend I ever had.
Well...that's a good place to start.

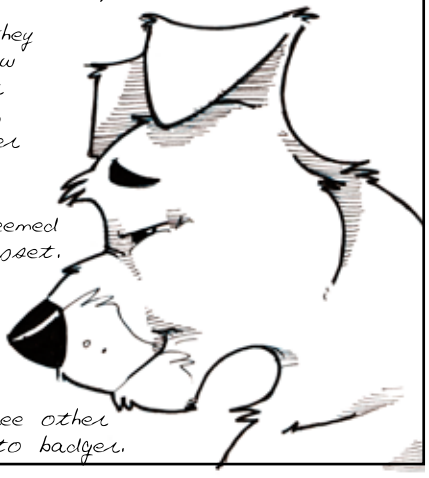
Well, Douglas, all things considered, Marty's dinner party didn't go too badly.



For better or for worse, he's out to his family, now, and they seemed to take it very well. And if their reaction wasn't exactly what he expected, well...

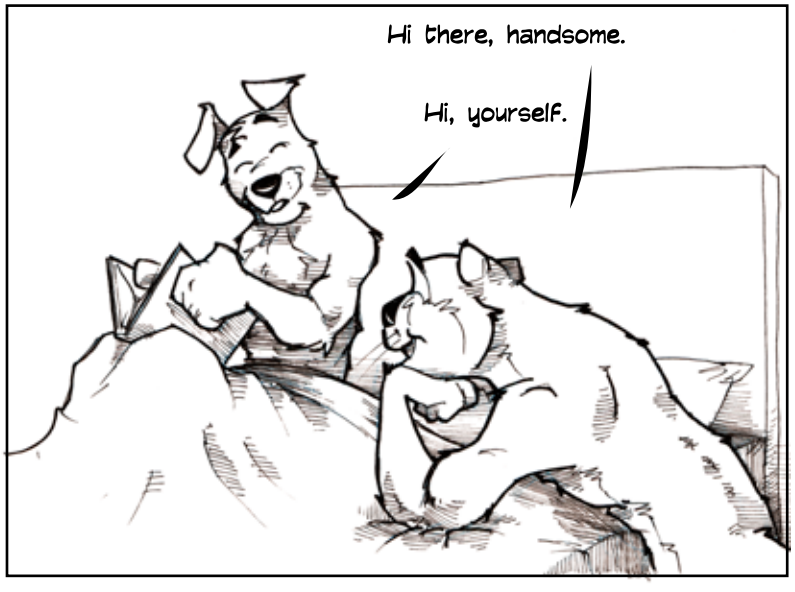
At least they didn't throw him out, or disown him, or any other nonsense.

Grandma seemed a trifle upset. Oh, well.



She has three other grandkids to badger.

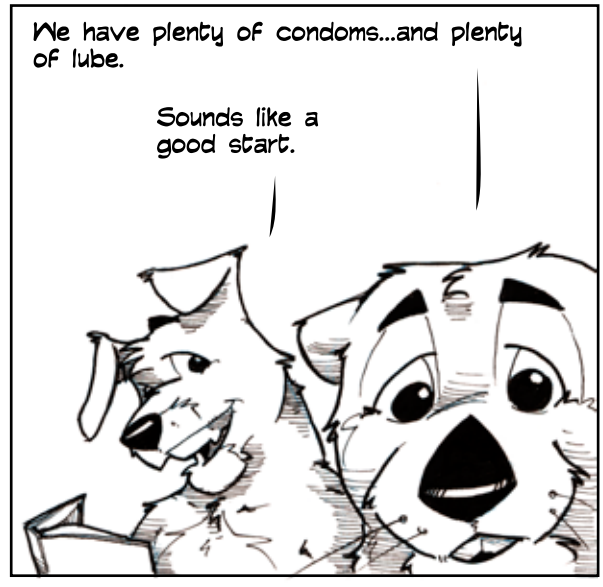
At least everyone enjoyed the chocolate pudding cake.



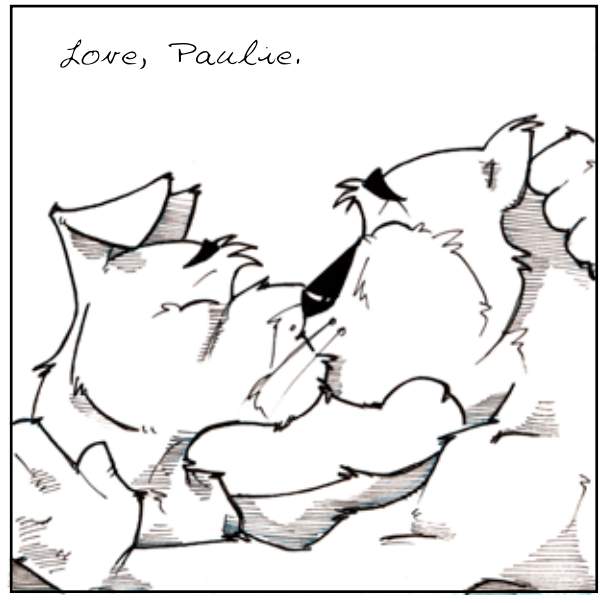
But... what if I don't want to wait til later?
Well, you're going to have to

You're here in bed with me now, and being a goober as usual...
Wanna play?

Ah...apparently, you're frisky, so I'm going to sign off.
I would love to, as long as we re careful. Do we have supplies?


We have plenty of condoms...and plenty of lube.
Sounds like a good start.

Take care of yourself, my love.


Love, Paulie.

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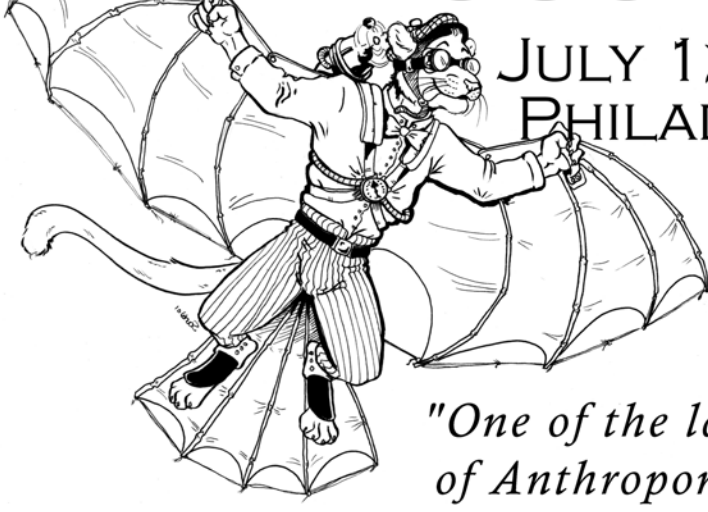

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TOPS & BUTTON

For two years, beginning three decades ago, a young gay cartoonist named Howard Cruse offered Birmingham's newspaper readers a daily dose of anthropomorphism in his panel featuring a pair of squirrels. Here are samples.

Excerpted below are Howard's comments on the genesis of TOPS & BUTTON, *from his Preface to* EARLY BAREFOOTZ *(1991, Fantagraphics Books).* *©1990 by Howard Cruse; reprinted by permission of the author.*

Like *Barefootz*, *Tops & Button* grew out of an idle sketch. Two vertical lines, to be exact. The edges of a tree trunk, perhaps? I added two holes in the trunk. Squirrel heads emerged. Who were these squirrels? I drew a tall, thin box around the tree and considered the possibilities. Suppose the squirrel on top were to say something and the squirrel on the bottom were to respond. Suppose what they said were to be mildly funny. Could there be a cartoon series in this? A series that might appeal to a mainstream Birmingham audience?

TOPS & BUTTON
LOOK! A RAINBOW IS ENDING RIGHT AT OUR TREE!
...IS THERE A POT OF GOLD DOWN THERE?
NO, BUT THERE'S A FORM LETTER FROM A MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTION COMPANY THAT SAYS "YOU MAY HAVE ALREADY WON A POT OF GOLD" ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE ENVELOPE...
CRUSE ©1970 by H. Cruse

I mulled over practicalities. My squirrels-in-a-tree imagery was pretty simple, graphically speaking. I could knock out six such drawings a week easily, I figured, even on top of my 9-to-5 job. Maybe a corny, unassuming funny-animal panel would actually play in one of our local dailies.

I drew three weeks' worth of samples and made an appointment with Duard LeGrand, the editor of the Birmingham Post-Herald. He had been a friend and colleague of my father's years ago· That couldn't hurt·

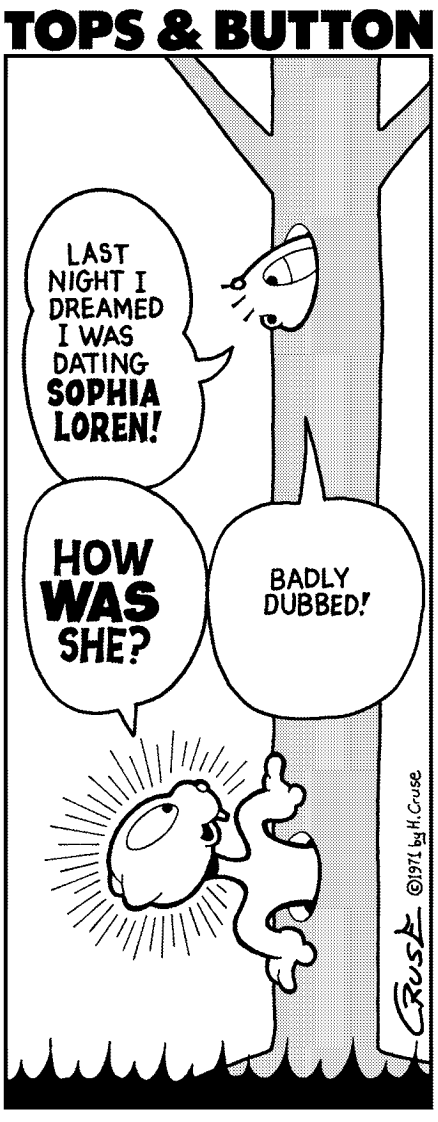
LeGrand liked my squirrels and immediately recognized the handiness of *Tops & Button*'s vertical format. Newspapers can always use one-column filler. None of the Post-Herald's popular strips would need to be bumped from the comics page to make room for my series; the squirrels could do their thing wherever a hole opened up in the day's layout. LeGrand agreed to launch *Tops & Button* as a daily feature on June 8, 1970. A two-year run ensued.

Tops & Button laid the groundwork for the cartooning approach I would find myself using a year later in *Barefootz*. Its pastoral feel of it foreshadowed Barefootz's unhurried calm. The dialogue in *Tops & Button* often had a philosophical subtext, as did the conversation and events in *Barefootz*. And like *Barefootz*, when *Tops & Button* was satirical it was gentle about it It almost never sneered

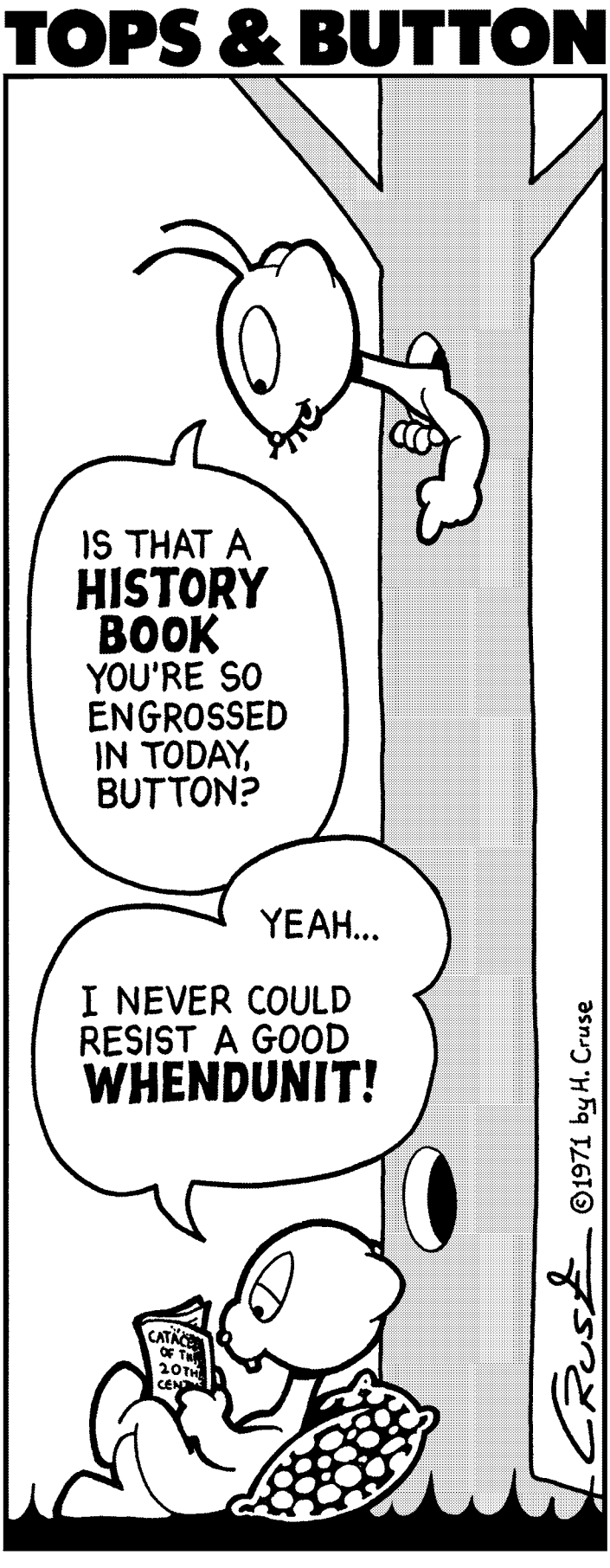
The graphic look of *Tops & Button* also foreshadowed the look of *Barefootz*. The concept of my squirrel series required that each day's panel feature the same long shot of the tree, always seen from its roots to the lowest of its branches. Because the tree's size never varied, neither did the sizes of the characters playing scenes alongside it, who, like actors on a stage, were always seen from head to toe.

I unconsciously brought this visual pattern along when I got the chance to revive *Barefootz*. In laying out what was intended to be the introductory episode for a continuing series, I used no changes of perspective and kept to simple, full-body shots in the *Tops & Button* mode. Force of habit was at work....

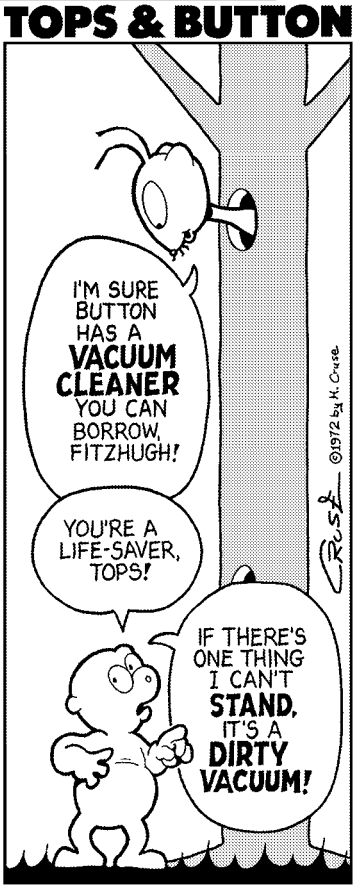
At right: BAREFOOTZ *followed* TOPS & BUTTON*'s visual lead by favoring full-body characters viewed as if on a stage.*
©1971 by Howard Cruse

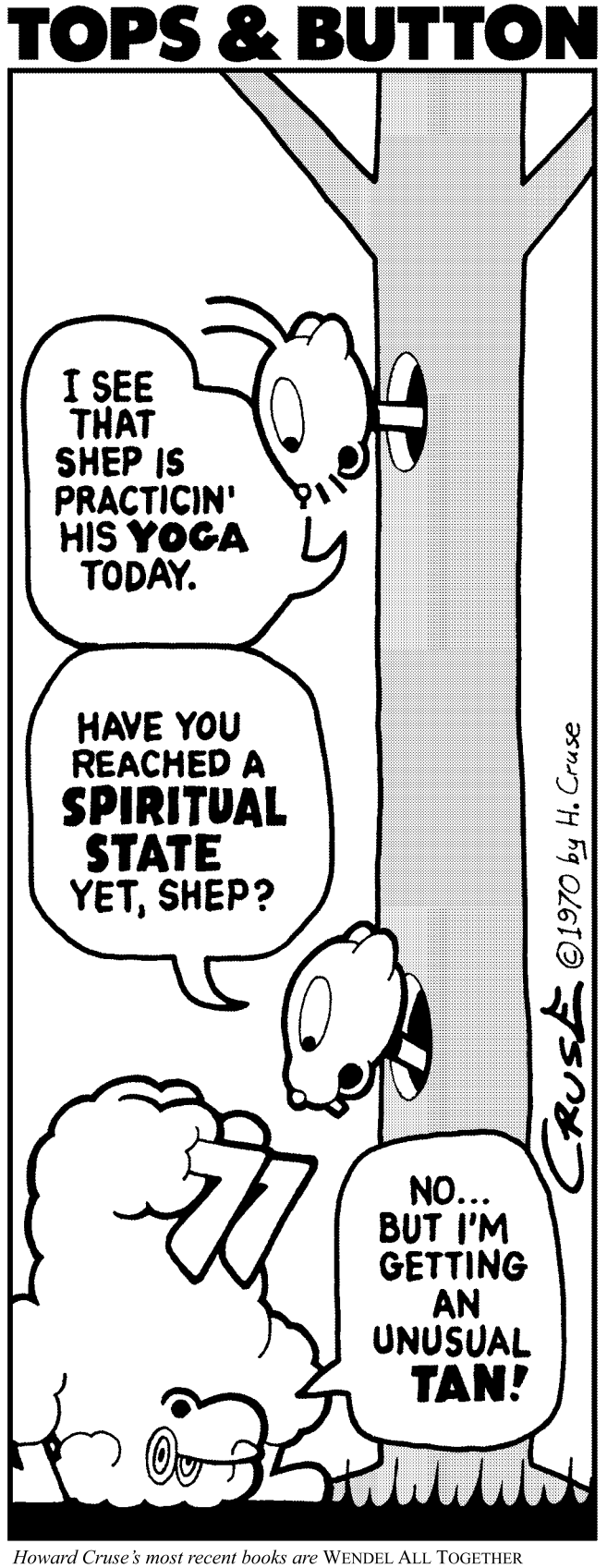

TOPS & BUTTON
LAST NIGHT I DREAMED I WAS DATING SOPHIA LOREN!
HOW WAS SHE?
BADLY DUBBED!
©1971 by H. Cruse
Cruse

I FEEL LIKE I'M IN A COMIC STRIP AND PEOPLE ARE LOOKING AT ME AND SMIRKING!


TOPS & BUTTON
IS THAT A HISTORY BOOK YOU'RE SO ENGROSSED IN TODAY, BUTTON?
YEAH...
I NEVER COULD RESIST A GOOD WHENDUNIT!
©1971 by H. Cruse
Cruse

TOPS & BUTTON
HOW'D YA LIKE PLAYIN' SANTA FOR TH' ORPHANS THIS MORNIN', LOVEBANG?
I'VE BEEN GOIN' 'HO-HO-HO' TILL I THOUGHT I'D UP-CHUCKLE!
CRUSE ©1970 by H. Cruse


TOPS & BUTTON
I'M SURE BUTTON HAS A VACUUM CLEANER YOU CAN BORROW, FITZHUGH!
YOU'RE A LIFE-SAVER, TOPS!
IF THERE'S ONE THING I CAN'T STAND, IT'S A DIRTY VACUUM!
CRUSE ©1972 by H. Cruse


TOPS & BUTTON
I SEE THAT SHEP IS PRACTICIN' HIS YOGA TODAY.
HAVE YOU REACHED A SPIRITUAL STATE YET, SHEP?
NO... BUT I'M GETTING AN UNUSUAL TAN!
CRUSE ©1970 by H. Cruse

Howard Cruse's most recent books are WENDEL ALL TOGETHER *(2001, Olmstead Press) and the awardwinning graphic novel* STUCK RUBBER BABY *(1995, Paradox Press).*

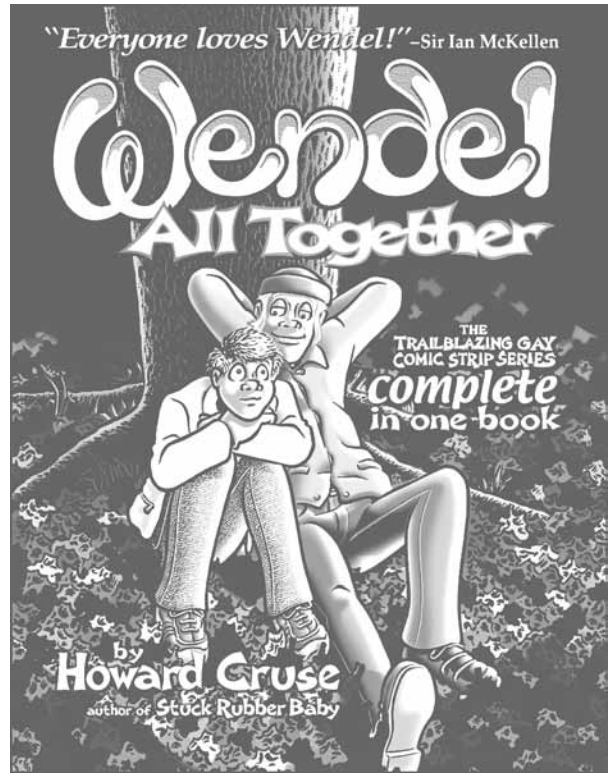
Visit Howard's web site: www.howardcruse.com

Buy More Books

Complete your collection of Howard Cruse's works. The newest selection, ***Wendel All Together***, contains absolutely everything of the story of Wendel. Get all the early strips from The Advocate, the short run in Gay Comics, and even some stuff you've never seen before.

Early Barefootz: It's a guy in a suit and tie and really big feet in a surreal world. It's trippy fun humor.

Also, don't forget Howard's award winning book, ***Stuck Rubber Baby***. Follow the story of a young man growing up in Kennedytime and how he copes with being gay in the Deep South during the civil rights movement.



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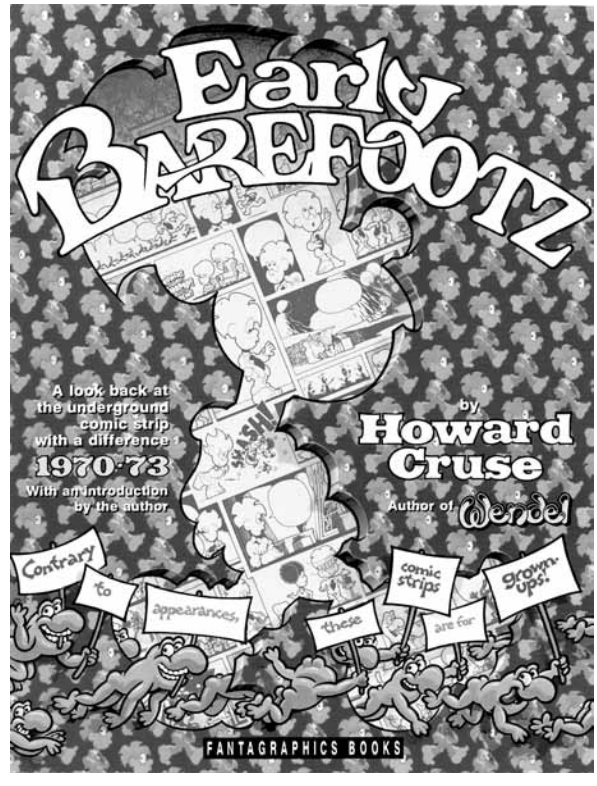

6 kinsey circle

letters to the boys

Andy replies to some letters...

Greetings all,

Just returned from AnthroCon yesterday and finally sat down to read issue #1 of Circles. It's fantastic. The characters seem very real. In fact, I feel quite a bit of sympathy and sorrow for Paulie. I feel sorry for Douglas and Arthur too. Their whole situation was very well presented in both writing and illustration.

Now is the part where I get all excited and talk about how adorable Marty is, especially when he blushes. I see a bit of myself in him, so I'm certainly going to enjoy watching how he interacts with everyone else as he settles into the apartment. My favorite panel in issue #1 has to be the one where Marty blushes and Taye says, "OMIGOD! I can't believe you're blushing." Anyway, great first issue and I look forward to reading the next.

Signed (or typed, I suppose), Ryan a.k.a. MetalFox

Thank you very much, Ryan. As a Marty fan, I hope you've enjoyed this issue particularly. Two of the comments we heard most often were "the characters seem so real" and "I resemble..." or "I am (whoever.)" I take this as a great compliment, since one of our main goals was to create a cast that people would identify with and empathize with. Certainly the problems and joys that our cast will deal with are ones we or people we know have faced.

Hi Gang!

I just got my copies of Circles #1 today... which I enjoyed reading since today I'm sick as a do... ummm... under the weather. (Sorry Paulie.)

The comic is very good, indeed! Believable dialogue, lotsa setups for subplots, and, of course, Taye is "Faaabulous" (I especially loved his expression when Marty blushed).

I have only one small nit-pick. A lot of the pencil lines are still visible in some of the panels, some more noticeable than others. A very minor point overall, but there you have it.

Andy, Steven, Scott and Sean, you have a winning comic here! BTW, I enjoyed reading the teeny-tiny print in the newspaper. If only journalism in the real world was that truthful. :)

Peace, Mark "PunkTiger" Correia

The "blushing" panel seems to have been a favorite for many, Mark. As has been related on our netgroup (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/circles-comic), we didn't intend for the pencil lines to be there. Some people really liked them, and some people really didn't. Although a poll we conducted there showed us that most people liked them, or, at least, didn't care enough to ask us to get rid of them, we decided to take them out in order to show off Scott's wonderful finished artwork.

The little newspaper articles were actually added by Sean during the finishing process, except for the Dr. Laura one, which was added by Steve. :)

[You may notice in the newspaper articles some gratuitous cameos. Alicia Rabbitt is my sister and an engineering student URI. Amanda Rabbitt is her twin sister (though you would never believe it) and enjoys complaining about winter at UMASS. - Ed.]

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6 kinsey circle

letters to the boys

Dear Boys,

First of all, let me say that Circles #1 may well be the best expenditure of five dollars I have ever made.

Scott, as always, your command of facial expressions is no less than superb. The looks on Marty's face when Paulie mentions his relationship with Douglas and Taye introduces himself are absolutely priceless. "Breathe, dear." <^,^> And, IMHO, the pencil lines don't detract at all.

The enigmatic Taye is finally revealed. And he's cute! :) Both in appearance and personality, he's adorable. But, aren't they all? Except maybe... Ken is a nice guy, but seems a bit shallow. A body that won't quit and a brain that may at times have problems starting. I sense a disturbance in the Force. I hope Paulie's fears for our resident cheetah do not come to fruition, but I do share them.

I liked the sideline story by Iyu, too. The news clipping gave me a smile as well. Progress, indeed. I am truly amazed, especially when I realize that a year or so ago, this was just pure speculation. Awesome work, guys. Keep it up.

Sincerely, Wolf Starchaser

Wolf has been a very staunch supporter of the book since we first announced it, way back when, but we were still unprepared for his very gratifying comments.

Taye really made an impression on our readers. On our adult group (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/circles-adult), he captured the poll results as "Sexiest Character", and he almost captured the main group's "Favorite Character" poll, too. In the end, however, a few Marty votes gave our "nice Jewish boy" the lead and the win.

Hello All,

I just finished reading Issue 1 and I wanted to send you all a quick E-mail, and let you know that I think its awesome. I've always been a fan of Scott's artwork, Girlilla kept me in stitches back when he used to have the strips posted at his FurNation site. *[http://www.furnation.com -Ed.]*

The characters are so believable that I was crying at the end as Paulie got into bed. Keep up the excellent work guys, I look forward to every issue that is to come. Now if I can just get my boyfriend and my roommate to start reading it... Thanks for taking the challenge.

Sincerely, Kat

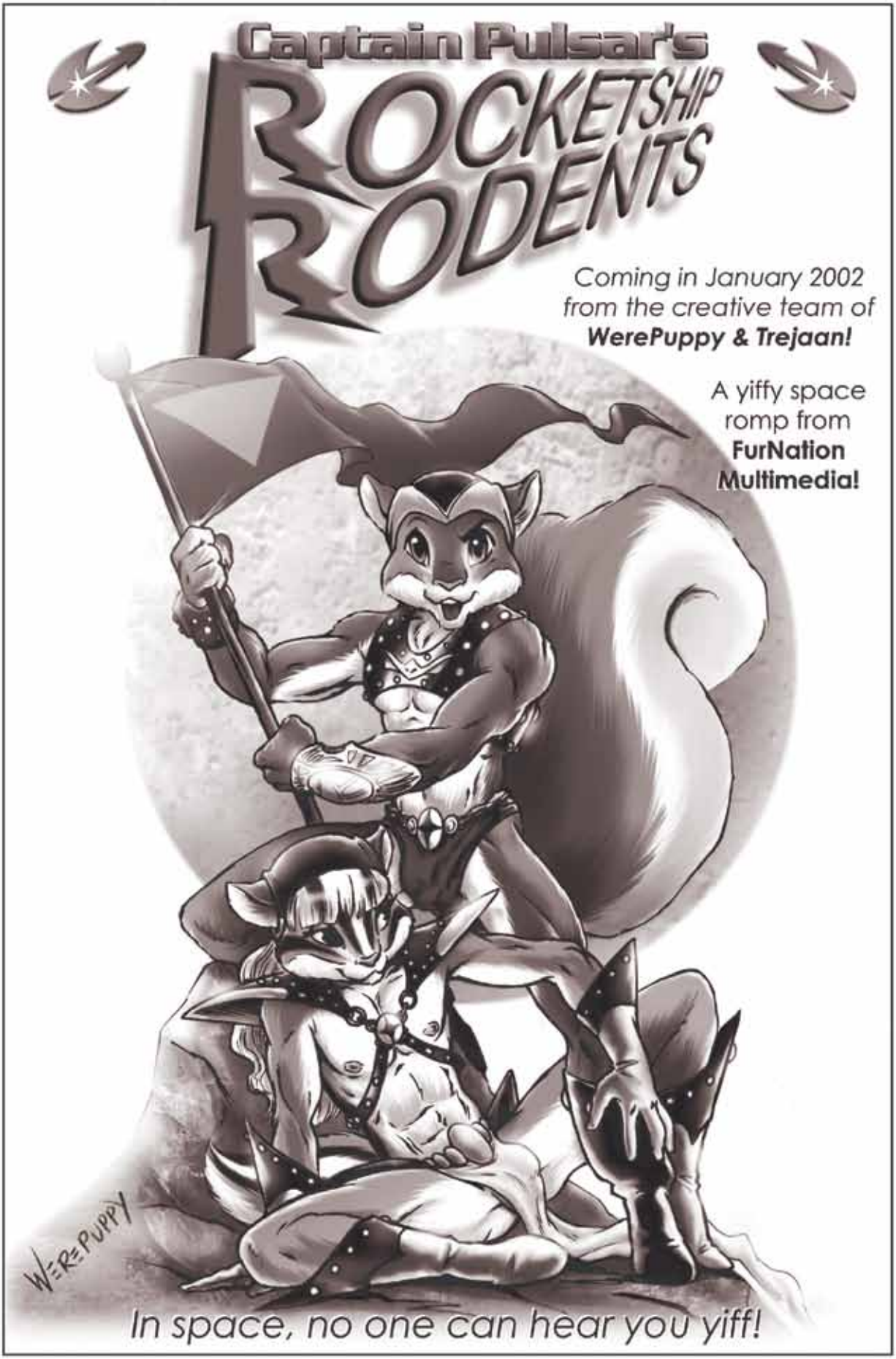
Thanks, Kat. I hope you were successful in your planned campaign to get others to read it.

Coming next issue

Two Tales of the Kinsey Six.

In our first story, "Paper Faces on Parade", Arthur makes overtures of peace to Douglas, but Douglas still blames Arthur for Paulie being ill. When tempers flare, will the Kinsey Six be down to Five?

Then, in the second story, "Steppin' Out", it's Halloween, and Marty and Taye are finally having their first date. But, when a figure from Taye's past rears his ugly head, will it be their last, as well? All this plus the first appearance of Jesús, the Peruvian drag-queen llama! Is the world prepared? Don't miss our dramatic double-header in issue #3!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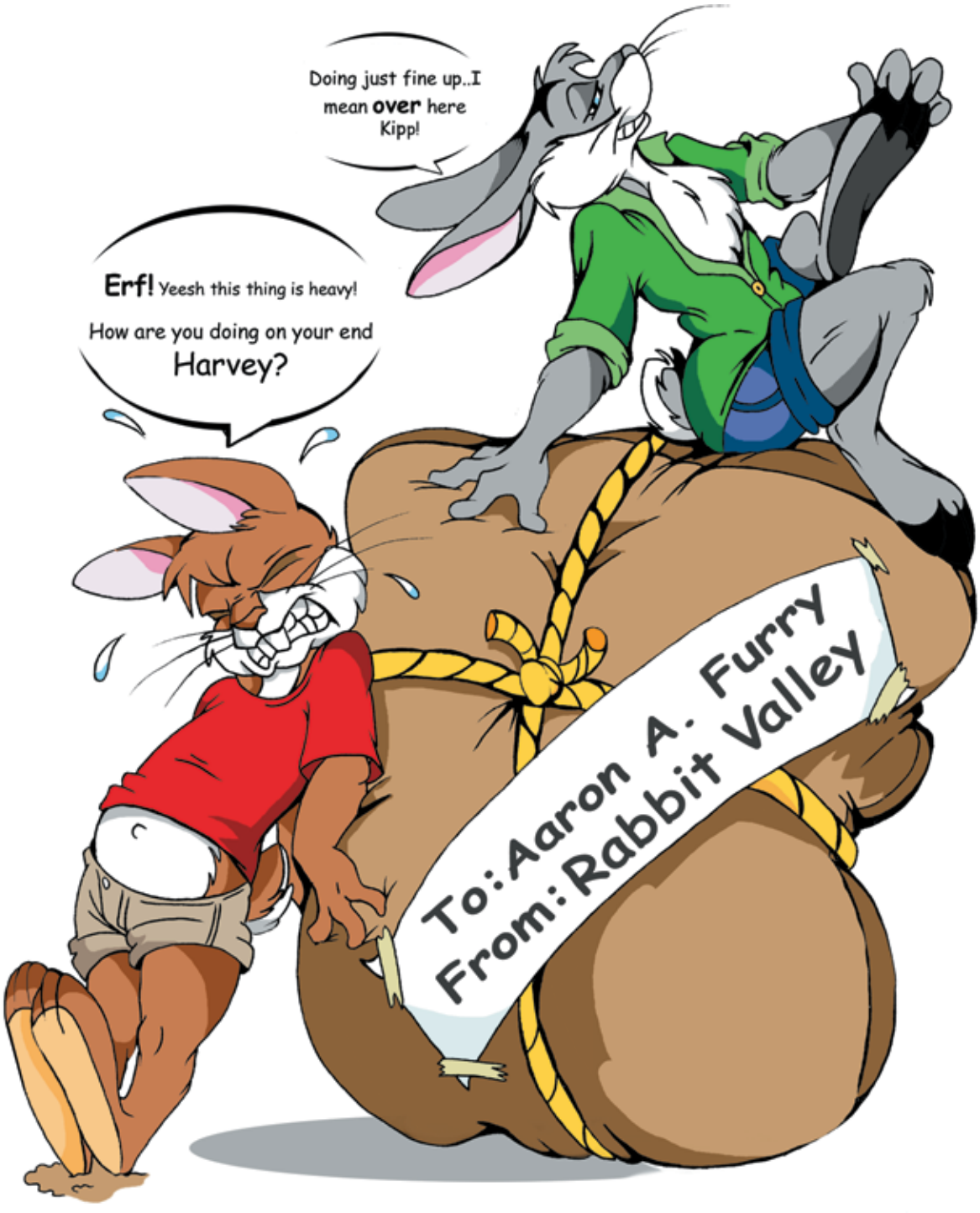
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Erf! Yeesh this thing is heavy!
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